PAIN AND MENTAL PHENOMENA:
THINKING AT THE LIMIT WITH MODERN PHILOSOPHY

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Introduction

The chapters that make up this dissertation largely stand on their own as independent pieces of scholarship. However, the reader will nevertheless detect a hidden leitmotiv that runs throughout these chapters—one that concerns our own time and social situation as much as that of the philosophers who created them: what is the relation between pain and culture? How does pain shape and determine mental phenomenon? And how does our capacity for pain determine our capacity for creativity?

Rather than merely summarizing the conclusions of my dissertation, this introduction will instead put these concepts to work in a creative effort to understand something of the contemporary zeitgeist. That is, before placing the ideas of these thinkers under the synthetic light of the scholar's reading lamp, I will bring them out into the natural light of our own situation. This exercise will lend the more properly scholarly discussions that are to be found in the body of this dissertation an air of contemporary relevance that they would have otherwise lacked. I also hope that it will release some of the latent disruptive power of the philosophical concepts that are examined there, revealing these concepts as useful tools of social critique.

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It is generally held that our time is one that is wanting for a unifying image of culture. But perhaps, in the narrower sense of the term, we are not 'wanting' for such an image at all. If we lack such a unifying image, it may be that this is precisely because we no longer desire it. Rather than unifying images, our time is above all characterized merely by an ever-shifting dispersion of problems-to-be-solved. These problems appear to circle restlessly around an insatiable desire for making life pass more *effortlessly*, more *painlessly*.

Understood in this way, a problem is always the sign of a tension to be released, an obstacle to be overcome, or a wound to be healed. It finds its place in an already-constituted historical or natural constellation. The terms 'inefficiency,' 'imbalance,' and 'dysfunction'—whether we find them in economics, social theory, or psychology—are always the watchwords for some wasteful excess of effort that itself obstructs the easy path to fulfillment and enjoyment.

Whereas the pre-Modern era turned to the priest or the philosopher for guidance, beginning with the period of Modernity, we in the West have found ourselves turning increasingly to technicians, experts and scientists for answers to our problems. If we now discover that ours is an inescapably *technocratic* society, this is no doubt because we always seem to enter the scene after these problems have articulated themselves as problems. We are like schoolchildren who arrive in the classroom after the schoolteacher has written the day's exercises on the chalkboard. Now we are consigned to the task of simply solving these problems, and are never allowed the opportunity either to choose our own problems or to articulate them ourselves.[1]

And just as the problems are always already articulated for us, so also does it seem that the answers to these problems are merely waiting to be discovered by means of already existing methodologies. In this sense, we appear to be condemned to suffer the solutions as much as the problems themselves. There is little room in the process for a genuine contribution of one's own.

If man has in this sense himself become little more than this shifting constellation of problems, then what would remain of him if the totality of these problems were finally to be solved? Would he find himself transfigured into an

[1] Deleuze, G. (1991). *Bergsonism.* (H. Tomlinson, & B. Habberjam, Trans.) New York City: Zone Books.

overman or would he rather become a kind of a pure monstrosity? Or, if every disturbance to which man is subject were eliminated, would he simply disappear from the surface of the earth?

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This question of what would remain of man if he were relieved of these problems finds its first thoroughly Modern articulation in Descartes (*Chapter 1*). In *The Passions of the Soul*, he seeks to render clear the difference in kind between the actions of the soul and those of the body. His aim is first of all to distinguish between the movements that have their cause in the mechanisms of the body and those that are freely caused by the will. In his view, the actions of the body upon the soul must be clearly and distinctly understood, and this understanding will not only yield a sense of the real limits of the body's actions upon the soul, but also techniques for controlling these actions, which will serve to give consciousness back to itself and liberate it for its own aims. With this, the problem of the passions will find its solution.

What precisely the aims of the soul are beyond that of understanding and mastering nature, Descartes rarely says. Notwithstanding his assertion that the soul is a substance, it remains nevertheless unclear what positive determinations we might attribute to it other than *the freedom of the will*. In *Passions,* when speaking about the two principle kinds of will, active and passive, he proffers the following remark: "Our volitions in their turn divide into two sorts: actions of the soul that aim only at something in the soul itself, as when we will to love God or in any way to apply our mind to some object that isn't material; and actions of the soul that aim at some event in our body, as when we will to walk..." In these comments, though he does not positively indicate just *what* the freedom of the soul is, Descartes does give us some idea of just *how* we might apply the freedom that will be won by understanding the passions. Beyond the freedom that reveals itself as a power to understand and control the body, we are free to apply our will to *loving God*.

However, it may be that "willing to love God" is ultimately indistinguishable from the effort to understand (and to control) His creations, as Spinoza would later assert. As much importance as Descartes ascribed to the "true and sound judgments" pertaining to nature, there was nevertheless something in him that rebelled against the

reduction of man's purpose merely to the scientific effort of tracing, understanding and mastering the mechanical movement of functions of the natural body. Descartes understands the body by recourse to contemporaneous technologies, and so it should come as no surprise that the collapse of the cogito into the immanent bodily object would imply the reduction of the free subject to a kind of machine-object. If, in Descartes' final account, man is not merely a host of problems to be solved—that is, a kind of malfunctioning or poorly understood machine—then it is precisely because there is something in him that is *irreducible* both to the mechanisms of the natural world and the effort to understand them.

Still, what stands out in *The Passions* is this effort to understand that part of man that is a movement of material functions, if only to put it in its proper place under the dominion of the soul. The promise of understanding the body is that of rendering it over more fully to the field of functionality and placing it more fully in the service of our will. As the body is understood and mastered, so also will the disturbing externalities of the soul diminish. And so, however much Descartes argues that man is more than a machine, it is clear that the understanding of nature that he seeks nevertheless possesses a vital importance for caring for and extending the life of the bodily machine. Insofar as this machine is the *vehicle* of consciousness, it is also a matter of great importance to the soul. In his *Description of the Human Body and all of its Functions*, he asserts that the benefits of understanding the difference in kind between the actions of the mind and those of the body do exceed those of ethics—they can also be seen to have a special importance for circumscribing the domain of medicine, which aims at "curing illness and for preventing it, and even for slowing down the ageing process."[2]

Could it be that Descartes viewed the substantialization of the soul as a last resort for maintaining the soul's separation from immanence? Such a move would preserve the soul for a future and a purpose that transcends that of merely following with the mind the immanent contours of the natural world and mastering its determinations. As we will see in *Chapter 1*, Descartes' preoccupation with defining perception as a moment of thought rather than as yet another mechanism of nature reflects this concern for maintaining the transcendental character of the soul. If perception were viewed merely as a natural mechanism, then the whole movement of

[2] Descartes, R. (1985). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Vol. I). (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

understanding, because it relies on the faculty of perception, could be reduced to that of *a machine that seeks only to know itself as a machine,* and the effort to understand the true cause of the passions could serve no purpose beyond that of making the machine function more smoothly and extending its durability.

The increasing currency of neuroscientific explanations of man together with the decisive shift away from humanism would seem to testify to the fact that as a society we have largely abandoned the Cartesian idea of the irreducibility of the soul.[3] With it, we appear not only to have given up on discovering an essential difference between man and nature, but because nature is understood as a purely mechanistic movement of functions, we have also abandoned ourselves to understanding man as nothing more than a sophisticated, if problematic, mechanism.

If our time appears to have relinquished its efforts to discover 'the ghost in the machine,' then perhaps this is because late capitalist, Western man is now content to find his reflection in the glossy surfaces of his technologies, and we may even wonder whether what Lacan has called the 'mirror stage' doesn't in our time really commence with the first sight of oneself reflected back from these surfaces. Strangely enough, it is probably this reflection that has once again inspired the Transhumanists to imagine that someday they might peer out upon the world from *inside* of these machines. They hold to the conviction that inhabiting the perfect machine would reveal the free subject in its absolute purity, and so the next step for them is to develop technologies into which their consciousness could be 'uploaded,' and whose parts could simply be replaced with the first signs of wear. In this way, by creating the perfect pleasure-machine, they would realize for themselves a kind of painless, effortless immortality.

Insofar as all of their efforts have until now been entirely oriented toward finding a solution to the problem of pain and mortality, we are left with the question of how such a being would occupy itself. Would it turn its attention to the creation of art or music? Could it have a sense of humor? Or perhaps, in a delicious bit of historical irony, would it ultimately 'shut itself down' out of pure boredom?

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[3] Of course there are many who continue to believe in the irreducibility of the soul to the body, but this belief appears to be a kind of afterthought that aims at supplementing the techno-scientific approach to life at the level of *meaning* and *purpose*. What is really striking is the rarity with which contemporary man becomes *captivated* by existential questions in such a way that they turn to religion, art or philosophy for answers.

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If, as Francis Fukuyama argued in 1992, the collapse of Soviet opposition to liberal democracy has brought about the end of history, then today we may safely venture the assessment that this end, rather than marking the final sublation (*aufheben*) of the object by the subject as Hegel imagined, instead appears to be characterized by a final reduction of the subject to the object. Likewise, historical progress (to the degree that it ever existed) has largely given over to techno-scientific development that aims at the creation of pleasure-machines that further decrease the suffering of those who enjoy access to them. Far from witnessing the diminishment of the mysterious power that the contingent object exerts over the subject and the concomitant discovery of the universal subject as pure desire, our time has seen the intensification of a desire for the absorption of the individual subject into the perfect technological object, which is, we might say, *a desire for the end of desire.* In the realization of the ultimate solution to the problem of pain and death, the movement of techno-scientific development arrives at its 'final synthesis.'[4]

The 'notion' (*Begriff*) according to which contemporary Western man finds his sense of unity is thus not to be found on the side of the subject, but is rather to be found first of all on the side of the object. But no later than when one first thinks of this objective unity has it already begun to decompose itself within the imagination into a 'bad infinity' of constitutive moving parts, and we find ourselves immediately occupied with the tedium of understanding the problematic relations between them.

Nevertheless, in this notion of the perfect mechanism Western man comes as close as he can get to the unity of the subject. Despite the reduction of subject to object, it may be that we continue to nurture the hope that at the end of this long process of technological development the subject will be revealed in its absolute purity. We

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[4] Ayn Rand's aptly-named philosophy of 'Objectivism' anticipates liberal transhumanism. The following dialogue from Rand's novel, *The Fountainhead* (2005, New York City: Penguin.) between Alvah, a lackey editor at a populist newspaper, and Dominique, the novel's libertarian heroine, expresses very well the secret connection between liberalism and transhumanism:
A: "What do you want? Perfection?"
D: "[Yes, I want perfection] or nothing. So, you see, I take the nothing."
A: "That doesn't make sense."
D: "I take the only desire one can really permit oneself. Freedom, Alvah, freedom."
A: "You call that freedom?"
D: "To ask nothing. To expect nothing. To depend on nothing."

suppose that whatever promise the future holds is to be discovered above all in the power of these mechanisms to further diminish our suffering.

For the Transhumanists, this future should be restricted above all to the effort to develop systems and techniques that extend life, reduce its disturbances and provide for the pleasure of mastery. If they largely ignore the environmentalist's demands for the care and preservation of nature, this is probably because the future that they envision for themselves is not *dependent* upon nature in any real sense, but rather makes the natural movement of functions dependent upon methods and technologies that operate according to his individual will. Now, the term 'nature' represents little more than the *obscene remainder* that has yet to be brought under technological-scientific control, and it is associated with that within human being and the wider world that resists being pressed into the service of the creation of the self-realized machine-object.

For a competing vision of the future, we have only look to those quarters of the population who have, because of their distance from the cutting edge of technological development, largely given up on the prospect of escaping from pain and death. That is, the real resistance to the utopian vision of a perfectly ordered technological future shows itself among those for whom its realization appears to be most remote and inaccessible, namely, the poor and indigent of the Third World.

These populations have been deprived of the technological means to realize bodily pleasure. They have found themselves unable to access the well-oiled machines that provide the wealthy Western man with his bodily pleasure. Unlike those unfortunates *within* the West who are likewise deprived of the means to these pleasures but who hold to the fantasy of someday gaining access them, the insurgents of the Third World are no longer captivated by this fantasy. They have ceased to nurture the hope that they might someday be welcomed to the bosom of the pleasure machine. Likewise, they have rejected the whole constellation of problems associated with its construction.

As we will see in *Chapter 5*, Hegel tells us that it is necessary for man to relinquish his claim on the sensuous particularities of the body in order to realize himself as pure, infinite Desire, and this implies accepting pain and death as the unavoidable fate of all living beings. The master appropriates life's pleasures to himself. He flees from the restless infinity of desire into the finitude of sensuous pleasures, and attempts to find himself in these particularities.

In doing so, he imposes the negative on the slave, and because this involves depriving the slave of the possibility of mistaking himself for the pleasures of the finite body, he has unwittingly created the conditions for the slave to realize himself as pure self-consciousness, pure Desire for-itself. Unfettered by the finite determinations of sensuous particularity, the slave is free to return to the unity of life with the clarity of recognition and the richness of self-consciousness.

Now, all that remains for the slave to do is to produce in the master the same awakening. To be recognized as a human being by the master, the slave must risk his body in rebellion against the order that has been imposed upon him by *refusing to provide for the master's pleasures*. What separates the human being from the mere animal is that the human being is willing to risk himself for something more than the finite particularities of bodily life, whether they promise pleasure or merely provide for survival. In rebellion, the slave not only reveals himself as pure Desire and as deserving of the recognition of the master, but he also deprives the master of the satisfactions that were available to the master because of the his submission. In turn, the slave creates the conditions for the master to realize that he is, like the slave, pure Desire for the recognition of the other. In Hegel's view, what man suffers from first of all is his alienation from other men and nature broadly. The self-realization of spirit involves man finding himself at home with others and nature.

In short, Hegel believes that without suffering, there can be no historical progress, meaning that *both* the master and the slave must endure this suffering. The slave must suffer because of the master's brutal imposition of his order on behalf of his pleasure and, in turn, the master must suffer because of the slave's refusal to provide for his pleasures.

But, as we have seen, Western man hopes to make his pleasure independent of the other's labor through the construction of the perfect machine, thus rendering the other redundant to its production. Instead of an opposition between masters and slaves, we increasingly have an opposition between those who enjoy access to these autonomous pleasure machines and those who do not. Unlike the slaves of Hegel's time whose labor was necessary for the production of the master's pleasure, today's representatives of the negative are increasingly deprived of whatever power he once possessed.

For those who are fortunate enough to have been granted access to these pleasure machines, what is demanded above all is that they fulfill their functions vis-à-vis these machines. Primary among the requirements for access is that they perform maintenance on these machines, work to discover their weak points, harmonize their functions and search for ways to increase their productivity and efficiency—in short, *to occupy themselves with the problems of the mechanism.*

The more that one demonstrates oneself to be capable of these functions, the more that one is permitted to enjoy the pleasures of the machine. In this sense, the slave and the master no longer exist as separate individuals, but within this social system the opposition has been internalized in one and the same person. While at work, this individual is a slave/functionary. Afterwards, with the money that he has earned while working, he becomes a master/pleasure-subject. (However, as we have already discussed, it is hoped that this internal schism between reality and pleasure will someday be finally overcome by the creation of the perfect machine that will function as a sort of self-sustaining substrate for the pure pleasure-subject.)[5]

Those who reject being reduced to these functions are deprived of the pleasures that are available by conformity to their demands. These individuals are simply driven out and compelled to exist among the other unfortunates of the obscene remainder. Because of the success of the mechanism in minimizing the requirements of slave labor, our social system has largely shifted away from the practices of compulsion vis-à-vis a slave class. The direct domination that once characterized the relation between the master and the slave is no longer necessary. Today, rather than being threatened or beaten, those who demonstrate their unwillingness or incapacity to fulfill their function are deprived of the pleasures of the machine and left to suffer on their own like animals in the wild.

This picture of late capitalism creates new difficulties for understanding our contemporary situation through the lens of Hegel's philosophy. Many of those who in earlier times may have been forced to maintain the pleasures of the master have been

[5] For evidence of this, we may look no further than the efforts of Flemish industrialists during the general strikes of December 2014 to entice their employees to work with massages, food, and champagne. The choice thus becomes one between the displeasures that are necessary to become a political subject (marching in the cold streets, possible confrontations with riot police, possibly losing one's job, etc.) and the pleasures that are available through the relinquishment of this subjectivity. (http://www.demorgen.be/binnenland/frieten-massages-en-extra-loon-voor-wie-maandag-wel-werkt-a2151584/)

accorded some share of these pleasures themselves, and because it is pleasure above all that sustains man's investment in sensuous immediacy, they have become incapable of realizing themselves as pure desire or self-consciousness. As such, even if gross inequalities exist with regard to how the pleasures of the machine are distributed, they hold to the prevailing order and never find themselves in clear opposition to it. Where there were once dialectical oppositions now there are simply more problems-to-be-solved.

As for those who do find themselves relegated to the margins, because their labor has been rendered increasingly redundant by mechanization, they have nothing that they can withhold from the master. With nothing to withhold, there is no way for these representatives of the negative to initiate the process by which the master might be deprived of his pleasures long enough to realize himself as pure desire or to pass beyond the bad infinity of problems-to-be-solved toward pure self-consciousness. The masters of today have apparently unhinged themselves from the dialectic movement of history, and as such have been allowed to develop themselves into monsters of consumption that live not only at the expense of their others, but also at the expense of the future itself.

Perhaps this explains the feeling of futility that is so common among those who have made efforts to renegotiate the social order. Having largely succeeded in hermetically fortifying themselves within their pleasure machines, these masters have managed to avoid the resolution of the very dialectical tensions that would have otherwise necessitated passing beyond their sensuous immediacy toward the recognition of their others. Technology has made it possible for the masters of the West to *defer* the neutralization of dialectical tensions that would have otherwise followed from the direct confrontation of the master by the slave. Now that the master is increasingly relieved of the burden of directly compelling the slave to fulfill his pleasures, he can entirely absorb himself in the effort to realize his pleasure without risking himself in a confrontation with the slave. And insofar as these dialectical tensions are not resolved in a direct confrontation, they have been exacerbated and are realizing themselves *in extremis*.

Today, every attempt to change the social order ends with disappointment, and the subject, to the degree that it is allowed to exist at all, is condemned to exist only in the shadow of these pleasure machines. Rather than an opposition between masters

and slaves, a new opposition emerges within our own society—namely, that between the pleasure machines and what for those who seek to create these machines appears as the obscene remainder. This remainder is precisely that suffering that remains *beyond* the reach of the techno-scientific machine.

To those who inhabit this machine, the evil of cancer, for example, is no different than that of Islamic State. Just as the machine deploys the surgeon with his mastery of medical technology to cut out and eliminate the cancer, it also deploys the soldier to eliminate the malignancy of violent extremism. This example nicely reflects the way in which the front between the machine and the obscene remainder is not limited to that between the individual and the external world. The opposition is first of all to be discovered within the individual's own body, between those movements that cause pain and those that cause pleasure.

For those who represent in our own times what the slave did to Hegel's—namely, the contemporary 'representatives of the negative'—because they have lost their power to directly obstruct the movement by which the master further invests himself in the sensuous immediacy of pleasure, the only remaining option is to destroy these pleasure machines. The body itself is the primary site of deployment for these machines and, as such, it becomes the primary target for destruction. Their social order is the inverted image of the West. Rather than a cult of longevity and pleasure, they have embraced a cult of death and pain.

In Hegel's view, these oppositions are always only apparent. Looking deeper, one can always discover a unifying idea that provides a framework for resolving their superficial opposition. He found this ultimate unity in the desire for the recognition of the other. What obstructed this desire from realizing itself is, as we have seen, the investment in the sensuous particularity of the body.

While it may be true that there is some deep, underlying identity within the merely apparent oppositions between today's representatives of the negative and those of the positive order, we will have to look beyond the purview of Hegel's thought to find it. To understand this identity, we have to return to our earlier remark that the shifts toward understanding man as a mechanical object, together with the possibilities that follow from it for diminishing his suffering through techno-scientific development, betray *a desire to bring an end to desire itself.* With the reduction of the subject to the object, desire is equally reduced to a deficiency at the level of bodily life. Life in its

most immediate form is *problematic*, and the hope is that technological advances can solve this problem.

Turning our attention now to the most obvious representative of today's negative—namely, Islamic State—*life is likewise problematic*. From their standpoint, the problems of life stem from the *obscene surplus of pleasure*. When they look to the West, they see nothing more than a frenzy of decadence, a mad race for pleasure and consumption—in short, *a cult of the sensuous*. Their feeling that the supreme problem of life follows from too much pleasure is grounded in the intuition that from the abundance of pleasure follows *the dissolution of the subject into the object*, and the resulting loss of the subject as a substance and a source of meaning that transcends the immanent movement of functions.

In this sense, even if it is different in nature, their vengefulness is also motivated by a kind of suffering—namely, *that of being deprived of their very subjectivity*. They experience the West's reduction of the subject into a kind of pleasure-object as a movement of the destruction of the meaning and purpose that is proper to the subject. And what is this if not a kind of suffering that follows first of all from the destruction of subjectivity by their others in the West?

But, now, in their effort to save the subject from falling prey to the whirlwind of bodily pleasures of the West, they have gone too far in the direction of the transcendent. It is in God that they find the basis for the substantiality of the subject and, because of His remoteness from life, the subject can only really recover itself fully in death. And insofar as pain announces the imminence of death, this already marks a partial recovery of the subject's true purpose.

If the West views ISIS as a cult of death and destruction, this is because they do not share their interest in the diminishment of suffering within life, let alone that of extending the period of life indefinitely. Rather, they seek to commence the problem of life as soon as possible to its solution, which is not to be found in the immanence of life, but in death. In death, they believe, the subject is delivered back to its transcendent source, where it can experience the pure blissful pleasures of جنّة.[6] And what does this desire to destroy life reveal if not *a desire to bring an end to desire itself*—the very same that motivates the efforts to construct the pleasure machine?

[6] The Arabic word 'Jannah' signifies the raptures of heaven for the righteous.

We have arrived at the deep identity between today's representatives of the positive and the negative. Hegel believed that life is not an indifferent collection of things but a progressive process by which it returns to itself in the infinite fullness of self-consciousness. Today, this progressive movement appears to have reached an impasse between the positive and the negative. Strangely, it has not emerged because of a difference concerning the *essence of their desire* (which is in both cases a desire to end desire) but rather because of the *route by which this desire is realized*. While those in the West aim to realize the aim of their desire through the creation of pleasure machines, the extremists of the Middle East aim at the realization of this desire by commencing life to the pleasure of death as quickly as possible.

In the thought of Freud, we discover the basis for understanding this impasse on the path toward development and reconciliation in the notion of the *death instinct*, which both functions to limit human beings to experiencing the suffering of the world as nothing more than a problem-to-be-solved and fatally obstructs the movement toward the infinite self-consciousness that Hegel envisions history to be.

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Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, which we will examine in *Chapter 2*, owes a great deal to the legacy of Descartes. Both this work and Descartes' *Passions* represent attempts to determine what in mental life can be explained by recourse to the mechanical movements of nature to which man is subjected. What sets Freud's work apart is that he does not begin with a conviction in the metaphysical supremacy and priority of the clear-thinking cogito. Rather, in the spirit of the stringent Positivism of his time, he sets aside all metaphysical presumptions regarding the nature of the soul, attempting instead to describe the developmental movement of the psychic life on a purely scientific basis.

Whereas Descartes understands the body to be a *machine* that was designed by God for the purposes of the soul, Freud understands the body to be a *natural mechanism* that is the product of the natural movement of evolution. And while it is clear that, because he remains within the strictest limits of scientific method, Freud rejects all finalism in favor of a Darwinian, mechanistic account of the body, neither is his focus one of describing the movement of evolution that has led to the appearance of

man. Rather, his interest is morphological—that is, he is above all interested in the resulting neurological endowments of the process of evolution and how they change under the influence of natural forces.

But what is Freud's primary motivation for his scientific investigations of the neurological conditions of mental phenomena? Unlike Descartes, whose interests in the passions are, as he says, first of all *ethical* and only secondarily pertain to *medicine*, Freud's interests would at first sight appear to reside exclusively with the implications of these investigations for medicine.

However, we may wonder about the degree to which the Freudian project is really devoid of an ethical or normative dimension, and whether it wasn't just as much of a motivating factor for Freud as it was for Descartes. The Cartesian irreducibility of the subject could be maintained only on the basis of what would appear to a more skeptical age as untenable metaphysical presuppositions. As the cogito lost the special dignity that followed from its essential irreducibility to the mechanisms of nature, ethical concerns could no longer be kept separate from those of medicine. Freud and his contemporaries thoroughly naturalized the subject and, as a consequence of this, *the concern for the good of the subject became immediately a concern for the subject's body*. Likewise, the question of right appears to retreat in some measure behind the scientific problem of pleasure, and wrong behind that of displeasure.

Indeed, the dominant ethical philosophy of Freud's time already evinces this shift from the ethical questions of right and wrong to the problems of pleasure and displeasure. The broad aims of J.S. Mill's Utilitarian philosophy express very well the tendency for viewing life's displeasures under the umbrella of problems-to-be-solved. And here we find the same displacement of normative questions concerning the purpose and value of the subject by what is really a *technical problem*; namely, that of how to fairly distribute the pleasures of life among the greatest number of people. Even if modern medicine doesn't follow the letter of Utilitarian ethics, it is nevertheless clear that its task becomes first of all one of solving the ethical problem of displeasure for modern society.[7]

[7] On his deathbed, J.S. Mill kept a diary (1910, London: Longmans, Green and Co.) in which he made the following remark: "Surely one of the most certain of the fruits to be expected hereafter from the progress of knowledge and good sense will be that nobody, unless killed by accident, will quit life without having completed the allotted term of three-score and ten." Because of the collapse of the question of value and purpose into that of the technical problem of displeasure, it is no longer clear whether Mill made this remark as an ethicist or as an

There is still another way in which Freud's aims exhibit this broadly ethical dimension. Psychotherapeutic technique seeks above all to bring about the *freedom* of the patient from displeasures that issue from imbalances in the psychic apparatus. And while it is clear that he seeks to win for the patient the freedom *from* these disturbances, what is missing in Freud's thought as much as in Descartes is any consideration of just what this freedom might be *for*—other than reconciling oneself as much as possible to the demands of realities both social and natural.

Though Freud's thinking may also be broadly situated with those who carry the burdens of problems-to-be-solved, as we will see in *Chapter 3* when we shift toward a discussion of his later psychoanalytical writings, he does think that among these problems there are inheritances of nature for which the psychoanalytical technician can find no perfect solution. *Man's fate is to be interminably neurotic*. In this sense, man is not merely *confused* as Descartes imagines, but is always *damaged* in some fundamental way.

Freud holds that human development really only commences because of an unavoidable encounter with some disturbing externality. Reality demands the separation of the child from his original pleasurable situation vis-à-vis the mother, and this will always be received only at the cost of great affective upheaval.

It is this upheaval that, to varying degrees, continues to disturb mental life throughout adulthood. In its worst cases, these disturbances become *pathological*. The pathological forms of neuroses follow from an inability to accept the loss of the immediately pleasurable situation of early childhood. Though the patient may be unaware of the true cause of his disturbances, something within his unconscious nevertheless continues to insist upon these early pleasures. This has the consequence that the traumatic loss continues to haunt his consciousness and inhibits his efforts to attend to the demands of reality. Psychoanalytical technique has as its main objective to diminish the symptoms of the neurosis as much as possible.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud wonders why it is that his patients often have such a difficult time getting over the loss in spite of having every opportunity to pass beyond it. His answer is that, against the Cartesian view that passions may

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advocate of science. Techno-scientific man no longer acknowledges a difference. And not only is suffering objectionable for him, but—insofar as it comes early—death itself becomes has become a target of reproach. The good is thus identified not only with increasing pleasure, but also with extending life.

ultimately be brought into perfect harmony with good sense, there are dark instincts within man that resist rational development and can never be rendered entirely harmonious with reality—namely, the *death drives*. These drives maintain the original libidinal attachment to the early pleasures of childhood sexuality, thus anchoring the subject in the past and making it impossible for him to give himself entirely to the present. They represent an insurmountable obstacle to the achievement of perfect psychological health.

As much ink as has been spilled in the effort to clarify this difficult text, it has largely gone unnoticed that it is as much a meditation on the limits of scientific technique's capacity for finally delivering man from his uncomfortable situation within life as an attempt to modify libido theory in view of the newly discovered idea of the death drive. Regardless of how sophisticated his techniques become or how much he understands about the nature of the body, the existence of the death drive means that in the final account man cannot escape from the insoluble problem of neurosis.

Indeed, the death drive is precisely that which has made of life's displeasures a problem for man from the start. And because it is responsible for the resistance to development beyond the primitive state of infantile sexuality, it also produces what we have referred to as 'the desire to end desire itself.' Thus, more than making life into a problem, it is also that which demands the ultimate *solution* for the problem of life, which is to be found ultimately in death.

The death drive at once problematizes life and makes it impossible to find an ultimate solution within it.

In Freud's thinking, the durable tension between extension and intensity within organic life is the result of some *accidental deviation* from the perfect equilibrium of inorganic materiality. Freud refuses to speculate on the question of how this deviation of life from inorganic materiality originates. Nevertheless, because it aims to restore the living organism to the state of equilibrium that is to be found in inorganic matter, the death drive functions as a *corrective* for this accident.

However, we may wonder whether Freud isn't confusing a condition of possibility for *understanding life* with the definitive *feature of life* itself—namely, that it tends toward the perfect stability of matter. It may be that all mechanistic accounts of life are susceptible to this misunderstanding. The concept of the death drive is entirely

consistent with the theory of biological mechanism, which always begins with the model of inorganic movement in order to understand the movement and development of life.

To the degree that life can be clearly understood at all, it is perhaps true that this understanding must always look first of all to that of inorganic materiality for its schema. After all, the movements of inert matter exemplify the lawful relationships (i.e. regularity of changes, predictability of effects) that are the primary condition for scientific knowledge. An instinct such as the death drive, which bends the spontaneity of life back toward inorganic matter, restores to the movement of life the regularity and predictability that is necessary for scientific understanding. But in doing so, it also deforms life into an inorganic mechanism, and ultimately destroys it.

Recall the problem that provides the initial impetus for Freud's investigations—that of (psychic) displeasure within life. We must also remind ourselves of our conclusions from the discussions in the last section; namely, that whereas finalism is the primary theoretical or theological framework for solving the problem *of* life itself, mechanism supplies the primary theoretical framework that provides for the solving of problems *within* it.

With this in mind, we arrive at the following question: Could it be that whenever one takes as his starting point a problem within life in this way—perhaps especially when it is life's *greatest* problem-to-be-solved—one is always already unwittingly inclined toward mechanism and thus, in Freud's case, toward discovering an instinct that perfectly abides its principles? If biological mechanism always takes as its model the relationships which can be observed in inert materiality, then perhaps it is the case that the inclination for seeing life through the lens of mechanism already disposes Freud to find death at the core of life. And when this framework is applied to the supreme problem that set in motion the whole tendency for embracing mechanism, life itself dissolves within it. In the case of Freud, life itself becomes a deviation from the natural order that needs a corrective.

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What stands out about the thinkers that we have discussed thus far is that they all carry the burden of problems-to-be-solved. Supreme among these problems are those of pain, passion and death.[8] If there is one still deeper similarity between these problem-solving thinkers it is the following: whether it is the *created order* of nature in Descartes, the *absolute being* of the subject in Hegel, or the *living existent* that is the product of the mechanisms of evolution in Freud—in each case they are accorded a truth and a priority that removes them from the creative act that constitutes them. For each of these thinkers, the task becomes one of tracing the movement by which this spiritual, historical, or natural being is deprived of itself (the problem). With this in view, one can then discover the path to recovery, which means relieving it as much as possible of its disturbances (the solution). In each case this is a process of *self-discovery*, which implies that there is some already-constituted being that merely waits to be mediated or revealed through proper practice, technique or method.

The philosophy of Bergson represents a decisive shift away from this *process of self-discovery* toward *a project of self-creation*. But we also find a renewal of Descartes' concerns about the reduction of the subject to the object. No less than Descartes, Bergson also revolted against the notion that man is nothing more than a material being. Particularly in the early work *Time and Free Will*, Bergson demonstrates his zeal for maintaining the subject's *radical independence* from the objective movements of the extended world. Perhaps he could detect in his own time the realization of the same fear that motivated Descartes to substantialize the cogito: at the cost of his subjectivity, man was becoming little more than kind of a techno-scientific machine.

However much Bergson's later thought would reflect this shift toward The Project of self-creation, his early thought nevertheless remains oriented in its own way toward self-discovery. Like Descartes, he proposes that the path to discovering the

[8] Hegel, though he is somewhat more ambiguous on this point, must also be included in this group. Even if suffering represents the impetus of historical spirit toward self-realization, spirit nevertheless seeks after the moment in which the negativity of suffering comes to an end. Thus, suffering for him still represents the supreme problem to be solved—in this case, by history itself. For Hegel, this corresponds with the moment at which spirit discovers itself in nature, the master in the slave, and the subject in the object. And so the suffering to which Hegel refers is not limited to that of the body, but reveals itself as a kind of suffering that follows above all from alienation. Still, it remains unclear how this final liberation from the suffering of alienation would express itself other than in the creation of a society within which a long, pleasant and undisturbed life becomes nothing less than an absolute right.

freedom of the subject must pass through an examination of the disturbances of affective life. Whereas Descartes suggests that these disturbances can be understood by recourse to the real mechanisms of the body ("the passions of the soul"), the Bergson of *Time and Free Will* holds that one *interprets* certain affective changes as problematic 'disturbances' only to the degree that one has already mistaken oneself for a bodily mechanism—which is to say, *a ready-made object* that merely gives and receives extended movement in the manner of a machine.

In Bergson's view, that part of the self that is most real is no mechanism, cannot be understood by recourse to quantities of force, and is not extended in any way. At the heart of what he calls 'the fundamental self' one finds *duration* alone, which is the flow of unextended qualitative difference from the past toward the future. Intuition provides us each with a direct and immediate access to this synthetic flow of qualitative multiplicity in the depths of the self, and thus with the capacity to apprehend the very essence of our own reality without the mediation of symbols, linguistic conventions or the forms that we use to understand the external world.

When one looks more closely at affective changes, one can see that, rather than registering degrees of physical force, they merely exhibit qualitative differences. With this, life is understood to be something more than a problematic mechanism. Indeed, in this account, insofar as life is itself nothing more than the durational movement from definite past to indefinite future, it begins to resemble a kind of *pure desire*.

Nevertheless, Bergson also suggests that there are good reasons for the human being to treat his body and those of the wider world as mechanisms. In doing so, these bodies are transformed by perception into *beings* that can be controlled and manipulated according to the needs of life. That is, if we have a natural inclination for understanding ourselves as mechanisms, this is not necessarily because we *are* mechanisms, but because it is *useful* to view ourselves in this way. As we will see in *Chapters 7, 8 and 9*, this utility reveals itself first of all as an ability to manage the affects, but it also reveals itself as that which makes it possible for us to use symbols, represent reality, and construct technologies that provide us with even greater mastery over ourselves and the external world.

With this, Bergson has revealed the *hidden instinctive aim* behind all mechanistic accounts of the body. The instinct effectively transforms the living flow of quantitative multiplicity into a collection of ready-made beings *for the purposes of*

action. In this sense, human intelligence, rather than *opposing* itself to this instinct, emerges instead as its further articulation.

We should be wary of allowing this instinct to dictate the truth of life. In order to make life manageable, the instinct for action (and by implication the intelligence, which works in the service of this instinct) effectively abstracts away from the *living being* exactly that which distinguishes it as *living*. Life is more motion than a static form, more duration than a durable being, more a flow of time than an object within space, *more desire than thing*. That is, it expresses itself above all as an *indivisible act* and *a movement of duration*. But when in the thralls of this instinct for controlling the direction of life and for eliminating what are perceived to be its problems and disturbances, we cannot avoid overlooking what separates life from dead matter, namely its spontaneity, novelty and unpredictability.

There is much of Bergson's early thinking that remains in the later works, *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*. However, because in *Time and Free Will* he accords to the fundamental self an ontological priority that does not extend to the embodied self, the very *reality* of the body is effectively diminished. This is reflected most clearly in the early conception of sensation. Sensation, like all modes of consciousness, is entirely unextended in this early account. If it seems to register the forces and perturbations of the material world, this is really because durational consciousness has become buried beneath habitual mechanisms and representations that facilitate action. That is, the forms of intelligence and the habitual contrivances that we use to manage the external world have effectively encroached upon the fundamental self, and now we understand the self through the mediation of these forms. *Desire gives over to bodily need.*

Psychophysics has it that when a sensation passes a certain quantitative threshold it *necessarily* becomes painful. For this theory, it is in the moment that the organism arrives at this objective threshold that the problem of pain first emerges as a problem that necessarily demands a solution. The body, insofar as it is unavoidably exposed to the dangers of the external world, arrives on the scene as a problematic mechanism from the outset. This problem is immediately one of *defense*.

But how do matters change if sensation cannot be *quantified* except by distorting its true nature? Bergson's method of intuition suggests a way to reveal the *real differences of quality* in a sensation behind the *merely apparent quantities of force*.

If affective differences are always really qualitative in nature, then what does it mean to say that something is more or less painful? Bergson asserts that this can only be a symbolic manner of speaking which introduces the quantity of the cause into the quality of the effect. But from this mere manner of speaking issue fundamental errors with regard to the nature of sensation. In fact, to identify something as merely 'unpleasant' rather than 'displeasurable' or 'painful'—insofar as each of these corresponds with increasing degrees of affective disturbance—this not only amounts to fundamentally *misunderstanding* the nature of a sensation but even to *feeling it wrongly*. Thus, *the feeling itself* no less than *the understanding of the feeling* becomes contaminated with the image of the quantifiable cause.

Unlike Descartes, whose methodology aims at solving the problem of the pain and passion through understanding and technique, *Bergson's early method would seem to reveal the problem of pain and passion to be an entirely false problem from the start.* However, extricating ourselves from the problem of pain may not be as simple as merely learning how to find differences of quality where before we mistakenly found only differences of quantity. From the early account of sensation there arise a number of fatal difficulties. The most notable among these difficulties is that, because sensations are understood to be entirely unextended, it becomes impossible to account for those sorts of sensations that seem to be characterized primarily by their *externality*; namely, those that make it clear to consciousness that one is contending with some vital threat to the real body that is precisely localized within extension. *Excruciating pain* cannot simply be brushed off as yet another difference of quality to which the self, because it is habituated to certain sensations over other others, is merely unaccustomed. Not only is a life-threatening wound felt in the exact place where it happens, its differences from the preferred sensations of normal, everyday life would seem to go well beyond a simple deviation from our habitual inclinations.

Matter and Memory addresses these issues directly. In this work Bergson realizes that it is necessary to restore to matter an ontological status that is equal to that of mind. Likewise, the conception of duration changes—whereas before it was identified with the 'fundamental self,' now it stretches between the depths of the self, which are characterized by unextended memory alone, to the superficial surface of the self, which exists as a moment of the extended material present. And with the restoration of an ontological status proper to the material present also arise all of the

very real problems that go together with this materiality. In this way, Bergson describes the extent to which man really is a host of problems to be solved.

As the condition for the insertion of memory into the present, duration provides the basis for man's freedom within the world. Though this notion that duration represents the basis of man's freedom within the world remains the same between *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, it nevertheless undergoes the critical modifications necessary to accommodate for the restoration of the unique ontological status of matter. And now Bergson must show just how duration reveals itself at the level of bodily life--that is, he must show how in the present movement of bodily reality memory may insert itself. There must be an occasion for the insertion of memory into the present movements of matter, but what is this occasion?

To answer this question, Bergson turns to a consideration of the nature of perception (*Chapter 8*). Normal or 'concrete' perception is far from a contemplative faculty. It does not view its objects impassively, but rather as objects of vital concern—that is, it views its objects in terms of the way that they represent promises or threats for generating *affection* for the organism. Furthermore, the distances between oneself and the objects of perception are not measured according to expanses of absolute space but rather according to intervals of duration within which one has the opportunity to choose between alternatives for action. Bergson is like Descartes in this regard: he holds that perception itself is more than the sum of perceptual mechanisms of the nervous system. As the nervous system functions as an instrument of perception, so does perception function as the mode of consciousness that concerns itself first of all with present action.

Thus, at the level of present perception, there is already always this interval within which memory images may insert themselves. But in addition to the distances between self and object that characterize normal perception, there is still another way in which the interval reveals itself. It is also revealed in the imminence of contact between the self and object—namely, in the 'specialized perception' that is *affection*. Whether this affection is pleasurable or painful, to varying degrees every person possesses a capacity to *resist reacting to the stimuli*.

This is of course quite different from reducing pain to an illusion that follows more from habit and representation than from some essential feature of the organism's vital relation with reality. Nevertheless, the basic insight of the earlier work, though modified, remains in the later work: *in the power to resist immediate reaction to stimuli,*

in the ability to endure pain, one experiences oneself as something more than a natural mechanism. And while Bergson never uses this term, it seems clear that we may understand this resistance to be the condition of kind of *desire* that aims at passing beyond the present toward a future of its own. With this resistance, one also proves one's capacity for holding out against the whole constellation of problems to be solved that go together with the mechanism. As one arrives at the limit of the capacity for resistance, one also discovers the threshold at which a sensation becomes a genuine problem. This is also the threshold at which an affective *difference* becomes an affective *disturbance,* or pain.

Duration no longer manifests itself only at the level of the fundamental self as it did in the early thinking. Since the power to resist stimuli is to be found in the body itself, we already discover at the level of organic materiality the condition for the insertion of memory images into the present. That is, the *nervous system* provides for a 'cerebral delay' that transforms the body into something more than a reflexive mechanism. And so even if Bergson must concede that there is a threshold at which sensation becomes entirely embodied, man is still more than the sum of his bodily endowments. The delay makes it possible for duration to manifest itself even within matter. More importantly, this delay makes it possible for creativity even in distressing situations.

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This raises new questions that Bergson does not really address: *perhaps some are better endowed than others for finding opportunities for creativity even in distressing experiences,* and thus for passing over the horizon of problems-to-be-solved. Or, by contrast, it may be that some arrive at the threshold at which affective *difference* becomes affective *disturbance* much more quickly than others. If it is the nervous system's capacity for delay that provides for one's creative response to the world, and if some have a *greater* capacity for this delay than others, then possessing a superior nervous system would appear to imply a heightened power for creativity. Certainly, the most creative among us are capable of repeatedly visiting in our own thought the very sorts of affective differences that are by others considered too painful to endure.

This relation between the strong nervous system and the capacity for the creation of the superior work of art or philosophy did not go unnoticed by Nietzsche. The following is a passage from a letter that he wrote to his mother in July, 1881, after the completion of *The Dawn*:

> My nervous system is splendid in view of the immense work it has to do; it is quite sensitive but very strong, a source of astonishment to me. Even the long and severe maladies, an occupation which did not suit me, and a dead wrong treatment have not harmed it basically. Indeed, within the past year it has become stronger and owing to it I have produced one of the most daring, the sublimest and deepest of books ever spawned by a human brain and heart. (Sils-Maria)[9]

The 'splendid' nervous system opens up the hidden *differences* in every experience without reacting against them. However much they might suggest a kind of distress for the organism, it is capable of *enduring* these differences long enough to find within them the contours of a new, more vital *image for life* (*Chapter 4*).

To think (affective) difference, one must first be able to endure it. Whereas the superior nervous system is capable of enduring affective difference *without opposition*, the inferior nervous system behaves as a *mechanism* that immediately opposes itself to these differences, treating them as disturbing stimuli that are to be avoided at all costs. The stability of personhood emerges as the nervous system embraces the peaceful side of this opposition, and the organism identifies itself exclusively with the *détente* of nervous forces. Henceforth, this person behaves as if his purpose and his destiny were to be realized only in the ultimate *elimination* of this tension, and he occupies himself with the effort to finally eradicate whatever antagonizes its identity.

In the character of Dr. Schafer from William Burroughs' surrealist classic *Naked Lunch*—a scientist who is modeled after the real-life bio-control advocate, Curtiss R. Schafer—we find an articulation of this attitude that the body must be purged of everything that maintains it in a state of tension. For Dr. Schafer, "the human body is scandalously inefficient." To remedy this inefficiency, Dr. Schafer creates his "masterwork" which he calls "*The Complete All American Deanxietized Man*." This

[9] Letter to Franziska Nietzsche, mid-July 1881. Schlechta, Vol. 111, p. 1170 = Leidecker, Letter 29, p. 81-82.

masterwork is an individual whose nervous system has been "reduced" and expunged of everything that produces feelings of anxiety.[10]

In our own times, there appears to be nothing very remarkable about such an endeavor. The massive, globalized industrial-pharmaceutical complex aims at precisely this goal. But however normal and commonplace this effort might seem to our society, in the imagination of Burroughs, the ultimate *realization* of the effort would be anything but commonplace. When in the novel Dr. Schafer finally unveils his masterwork to his curious colleagues at the "International Conference of Technological Psychiatry," to their horror what they see is "a monster black centipede"—that is, an insect-like monstrosity of a living spinal chord without skeletal structure, motor apparatus or organs. Schafer believes that, because nutrients and narcotics can be injected directly into it for sustenance and pleasure, the need for motor mechanisms that function to maintain the organism within its environment may be entirely eliminated. When stripped of its need for action, the motor apparatus represents yet another useless encumbrance. Indeed, the nervous tension necessary for motor movement was probably among the main sources of trouble at the start. And now the nervous system can be preserved in a state of *pure passivity.* The elimination of the pressures of the motor apparatus amounts to relieving the body of its need and its capacity to *act.*

Nietzsche suggests an elegant metaphor for the bodily conditions of a superior creativity with his image of *the bow*, which first appears in *Beyond Good and Evil* but recurs throughout the remainder of his writings. The death of God has had the consequence of creating a "magnificent tension of the spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known."[11] With the decline of Christianity, the body—now bereft of the sense of purpose that formerly oriented it—becomes an overfull reservoir of aimless energy, a kind of *useless passion without meaning or design.* Though Western man "experiences this tension as *a crisis or a state of need,*" in Nietzsche's view it is actually a great *opportunity* for the playful re-creation of mankind (my emphasis).

Burroughs image of the spinal chord stripped of organs and motor mechanisms is nothing other than that of *a bow that has been deprived of the bowstring.* Just as the spinal chord goes essentially together with the motor apparatus, so also does the bow go

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[10] Burroughs, W. S. (1966). *Naked Lunch.* New York City: Grove Press.
[11] Nietzsche, F. (2002). *Beyond Good and Evil.* (R.-P. Horstmann, J. Norman, Eds., & J. Norman, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 4

essentially together with the bowstring.[12] What sort of goal might an organism that has been "reduced" in this way achieve, other than that of merely beings sustained in a painless, effortless existence? *Is this even worthy of being called a 'goal?'* Is it not rather an *anti*-goal—that is, is it not the result of an anti-productive instinct, or what Freud has called the '*death drive*?'

As man becomes captivated by what he interprets as a *need* to reduce the tension of life, every genuine goal must be suspended until this need is satisfied. However, as we can see with Dr. Schaffer's masterwork, at just the moment in which this "need" is satisfied, man will have lost precisely his capacity for realizing the superior goal. The bow will have lost its tension, and its power for shooting arrows at higher targets will be lost forever.

As atrocious as Dr. Schafer's solution may be, it is nevertheless a highly creative technical answer to the problem of nervous tension. But when we examine such a technical creativity more deeply, we can see that it begins not with a creative *act* that involves an elemental affirmation of life in all of its affective modes, whether troubling or tranquil, but rather with a *reaction* against what it *immediately* perceives as some disturbing externality. And regardless of whether this disturbing externality is localized with the somatic element itself or is to be found on the 'outside,' somewhere abroad within nature, it is in any case this aversion to disturbances that provides the original impetus for technical rationality.[13]

Even if the *form* of this reaction remains somewhat indeterminate and reveals itself as a diversity of possible 'solutions,' the *fact* that this reaction must happen represents for the inferior nervous system a pure necessity that follows from its mechanistic nature. But this properly scientific reaction is not the only possibility. In the construction of the democratic institutions of the Enlightenment, Nietzsche finds yet

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[12] An interesting point of fact is that, until modern times, the bowstring was made from the muscle sinew of large mammals, such as elk or deer.

[13] Among Zarathustra's companions in Book Four of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is 'the conscientious one,' who represents the spirit of modern science. The conscientious one claims that it is "fear, after all...that is human being's original and basic feeling; from fear everything can be explained, original sin and original virtue. From fear my virtue also grew, it is called: *science*. For the fear of wild animals - it was bred longest in human beings, including the animal that he conceals within himself and fears - Zarathustra calls it 'the inner beast.' Such a long old fear, refined at last, made spiritual, intellectual - today, it seems to me, it is called: science." Zarathustra repudiates this notion that fear represents the basic feeling of humanity, asserting instead that it is '*courage* [that is] man's whole prehistory." Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* (A. D. Caro, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 245.

another effort to mitigate the disturbing tensions of life. Whereas the basis for the *scientific* reaction is the theory of mechanism (a theory that, as we have seen, is probably correct from the perspective of those who conceived it), the basis for the *democratic* reaction is the theory of finalism. As distinct as these two answers may be at the level of abstraction, they nevertheless share the essential similarity that they both seek to "unbend the bow" of nature.[14]

And, once again, what is this if not *the desire to end desire*? Nietzsche identifies this with the rise of *nihilism* and what he calls "the last human being," who appears in the period of history in which men "no longer launch the arrow of their longing beyond the human, and the string of their bow will have forgotten how to whir!"[15] Rather than availing himself of the vital 'tension of the spirit' that has been liberated in the death of god in order to shoot his arrow over the horizon of contemporary problems, the last human being instead interprets this tension to be *the sign of an inherent deficiency in the body*. In doing so, he effectively transforms precisely that which provides the living body with its creative power into a technical or political problem-to-be-solved.

Nietzsche opposes to this image of the last human being the image of *the creative master*, who recognizes that, not only would life not *endure* without this tension, it would also lose its capacity to *surpass itself* toward higher goals. The desire for the realization of the overman is a desire for a being who, *because he loves life, also loves the endless wheel of desire*. This is the man with "the most encompassing soul, which can run and stray and roam farthest within itself; the most necessary soul, which out of joy plunges itself into chance - the soul that loves being, but submerges into becoming; the having soul that wants to rise to willing and desiring."[16]

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[14] Nietzsche, F. (2002). *Beyond Good and Evil.* (R.-P. Horstmann, J. Norman, Eds., & J. Norman, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 4.
[15] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2006, p. 9
[16] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2006, p. 167.

DESCARTES

1

Cartesian Science and the Instrumentalization of the Body

The Cartesian image of the body as both object of and instrument for consciousness will profoundly influence the direction of modern science, predictably finding its way into the area of psychiatric research. Descartes' attitude toward the passions expresses very well the broad aims and objectives of psychiatric science and technique. Though today's psychiatrists may venture positions that appear to go beyond the dualism of Descartes, those theories and treatments that carry the most social and scientific currency invariably have one objective above all: preventing the body from disturbing the cognitive activity of consciousness and securing judgment from the accidental vicissitudes of the body, whether these disturbances come from the external world, as in the case of pain, or from the inner-movements of the organism itself, as with mood. These psychiatrists, whether knowingly or not, aim primarily at maintaining the functional equilibrium of the body for consciousness and judgment. If only in this regard they are late avatars of the same Cartesian problematic. Like Descartes, they conceive of the human body as a mechanism, and yet somewhere within this mechanism they also find the conditions for man's wholeness and responsibility. In what follows, we will examine in greater detail the way that the mechanisms of the body are understood to condition good judgment and, more importantly, the way that the passions can undermine it.

1. The Passions and Perception

> [E]veryone feels passions in himself and so has no need to look elsewhere for observations to establish their nature. (*Passions of the Soul*)

> There is no more fruitful exercise than attempting to know ourselves. The benefits we may expect from such knowledge not only relate to ethics, as many would initially suppose, but also have a special importance for medicine. I believe that we would have been able to find many vary reliable rules, both for curing illness and for preventing it, and even for slowing down the ageing process, if only we had spent enough effort on getting to know the nature of our body, instead of attributing to the soul functions which depend solely on the body and on the disposition of its organs.[1] (*Description of the Human Body and all of its Functions,*

When he says, "What is a passion in the soul is an action in the body" Descartes refers to the essential difference that is supposed to lie at the core of man's existence. This statement, and the duality between mind and body that it implies, directs us straightaway to the theoretical basis of his philosophy: *cogito ergo sum.* The cogito indicates the substantial unity of all thought. Thought, in Descartes view, is the exclusive office of the soul, and the latter's essential function is judgment alone. For all other functions one must look to the body, which is, by exclusion, essentially lacking in the capacity for judgment. Descartes posits two kinds of thought—active thoughts and passive thoughts: the former are those of the will, and can either be directed toward the body ("as when...we will to take a walk [and our] legs move") or pertain exclusively to the soul ("as when we will to love God"); the latter, being passive unlike the will, are not made to be what they are by the soul. These are "perceptions or knowledge" regarding the body, and are the chief modes of the passions. The same duality that we find in thinking and willing also exhibits itself in perception. Some perceptions—which can also be understood by the terms *feelings* or *sensations*—have the soul as cause, and others the body. Not only do I perceive the outside world, but I also feel the effects of the will in my own body. I will that my arm move and, in turn, I feel that it moves

[1] The Adam and Tannery volumes, *Oeuvres De Descartes*, (11 volumes) are cited along side the English translation of Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdochand and Kenny. The Adam and Tannery volumes are abbreviated as AT, followed by the appropriate volume and page numbers. The Cottingham translation, *The Philosophical Writings Of Descartes* (3 volumes), has been abbreviated as CSMK, followed by the appropriate volume and page numbers. AT XI 327; CSMK I 328, AT XI 224; CSMK I 314

according to my will. Thus, feeling and sensation are themselves nothing more than specific modes of perception vis-à-vis extension. All perception is oriented toward extension in this way; whether toward external objects, or toward the way that these external objects affect my own body or, finally, toward the movements of the body that come from the will itself.

Descartes also distinguishes between those perceptions that follow from real motions in or around the periphery of the body and those that do not—namely, "imaginations that have the body only as cause." This kind of imagination, though not caused by immediate contact with the external world or an active stimulation of the nerves, does not rank among the actions of the soul. Rather, it is explained as "preceding only from the fact that when the [bodily] spirits are agitated in different ways and meet with traces of different preceding impressions that have been effected in the brain, they happen to take their course through certain pores rather than through others." Dreams, fantasy and the aimless wanderings (free play) of thought are understood in this way. What initially seems to be a moment of perception, in which the nerves are stimulated by the motion of real, extended things, turns out to be only mere appearance.

> Now some of these imaginings are passions of the soul, taking the word 'passion' in its proper and exact sense, and all may be regarded as such if the word is understood in a more general sense. Nonetheless, their cause is not so conspicuous and determinate as that of the perceptions which the soul receives by means of the nerves, and they seem to be mere shadows and pictures of these perceptions.[2] (*Passions*)

In this explanation of the difference between genuine perception and mere imagination as it relates to the stimulation of the nervous system, we detect an attempt to discover the psychophysical conditions for Cartesian epistemology. By virtue of the way that they are caused by the mediation of the nerves, genuine perceptions have a "notable and determinate" cause, and thus lend themselves to clear and distinct description. The only clarification to which imaginations that have only the body as their cause lend themselves is negative: the recognition that they are "shadows" and illusions and, as such, are not proper candidates for knowledge.

Irrespective of whether their cause is the will or external objects, only those perceptions that come to the soul by mediation of the nerves provides the adequate

[2] AT XI 345; CSMK I 336

basis upon which a scientific knowledge of the body can be constructed. In article 19, Descartes claims that not only can we perceive the movements of the body, but also that we can directly perceive acts of our will:

> Our perceptions are likewise of two sorts: some have the soul as their cause, others the body. Those having the soul as their cause are the perceptions of our volitions, and of all the imaginings or other thoughts which depend upon them. For it is certain that we cannot will anything without thereby perceiving that we are willing it.[3] (*Passions*)

This brings us before an important question: Is perception a mechanism of the body of which the mind is merely aware, or is it a moment of thought itself? If I will that I move my arm and my arm moves, have I directly perceived my will, or have I merely perceived the *effect* of my will in the body? That is, have I perceived a real synthesis of my intention to move my arm and its actual movement, or have I merely perceived the movement of the arm irrespective of its cause, which I then reckon with my judgment to accord with my intention? The answer to this question is central for determining whether it is possible to directly "perceive' acts of the soul, as Descartes has suggested. In other moments, perception appears to be characterized as a mechanical function of the body itself that, because it has no immanent means of discernment, only perceives the movements of extension.[4] In this account, it is merely because these movements are judged by the mind to accord with its own purposes that they can be designated as extensions of the will.

2. Are Perceptions Mechanisms or Thoughts?

In his accounts of the difference between animal and man, we find the same tension between perception as nervous mechanism and perception as moment of thought. Though animals are, in Descartes view, mere mechanisms devoid of thought, they apparently exhibit a capacity akin to what Descartes classifies as perception in humans. They have an ability to localize and react to threats—that is, they possess a kind of *awareness*.

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[3] AT XI 343; CSMK I 335

[4] "All our perceptions, both those we refer to objects outside us and those that we refer to the various states of our body, are indeed passions with respect to our soul." AT XI 348; CSMK I 337

> [Animals] imitate or surpass us [in their cunning and strength] only in those of our actions which are not guided by our thought. It often happens that we walk or eat without thinking at all about what we are doing; and similarly, without using our reason, we reject things which are harmful for us, and parry the blows aimed at us. [...]As for the movements of our passions, even though in us they are accompanied by thought because we have the faculty of thinking, it is nevertheless very clear that they do not depend on thought, because they often occur in spite of us. Consequently they can also occur in animals, even more violently than they do in human beings, without our being able to conclude from that animals have thoughts. In fact, none of our external actions can show anyone who examines them that our body is not just a self-moving machine but contains a soul with thoughts, with the exception of spoken words, or other signs that have reference to particular topics without expressing any passion.[5] (Letter to Marquis of Newcastle)

The body is a machine that is devised for the purposes of the will. But it is also more than this. Because the body possesses within itself the means of its own preservation, in its normal functioning it exhibits a certain independence from the soul and its purposes. The human body displays the same autonomic functions as the animal body—respiration, digestion, blood pressure—all of which "may occur in us without our thinking of them,"[6] and occur without thought or judgment.[7] While these self-preservative movements of the body generate passions and can, for a being with the capacity of thought, become objects for reflection, those that exclusively serve this function are irreducible to thought and will. Life does not depend upon thought. And all life, including that of the human, can be explained by recourse to physical laws alone. To the impartial observer, there are none of our bodily movements that provide sufficient basis for the claim that our body is anything more than a machine that moves itself. Only the way that man avails himself of *representation* distinguishes him from the rest of nature as a thoughtful being.

Descartes embraces the Aristotelian view that man is the rational animal. In his view, man is a composite of rational mind and mechanical body, and there is nothing in

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[5] AT IV 573-4; CSMK III 302-3

[6] AT VI 46; CSMK I 134

[7] "Every movement we make without any contribution from our will - as often happens when we breathe, walk, eat and, indeed, when we perform any action which is common to us and the beasts -depends solely on the arrangement of our limbs and on the route which the spirits, produced by the heat of the heart, follow naturally in the brain, nerves and muscles. This occurs in the same way as the movement of a watch is produced merely by the strength of its spring and the configuration of its wheels." (AT XI 342; CSMK I 335)

principle that distinguishes the body of man from that of the animal. Both are machines, exhibit high degrees of organizational complexity, and have similar physiological features—a view that Descartes articulates in a letter to Mersenne in 1637:

> [T]he diagram of the brain given in the Optics was faithfully drawn after the model of a sheep's brain, the ventricles and internal parts of which are, I know, much larger in relation to the brain as a whole than they are in the human brain [because of all the mass]. But for this reason I thought the sheep's brain was more suitable for making clear what I had to say, which applies both to animals and to human beings. And that cannot be held against me; for I made no assumption in anatomy which is novel or in any way disputed by those who write on that subject.[8]

In the *Optics*, Descartes attempts to describe the mechanisms of the body upon which thought relies in its engagements with external objects. The drawing of the sheep brain to which he refers in this passage served as his model for discussing the physiology of the visual system of the human body.[9] These physiological features are "common to beasts and men," and between the sheep brain and the human brain we can discover no difference of kind. Certainly the body of man exhibits more organizational complexity than, for instance, the sponge, but there is scarcely any discernable difference in complexity between the body of the human and that of the sheep, each of which is, when taken by itself, apparently lacking in rationality and thought. Every movement can be explained as if it were the result of mechanical principles alone. Moreover, the human and the sheep body share many of the same features—the very same instruments of perception that we find in human bodies are also found in sheep; namely, a complex nervous system, eyes, ears, nose, etc. For this reason, the principle according to which the distinction between a rational power of thought and a pure mechanism can be made is not immanent to the body or to the plane of extension. Even if it is the case that a higher order of complexity is necessary for subtle or sophisticated rational engagement with external objects, the presence of complexity is, in his view, never sufficient to account for the difference between an organism that exhibits a capacity for rationality and the one that does not. Likewise, the power of rationality cannot be explained by recourse to the presence of specific physiological mechanisms that are found both in

[8] AT I 378; CSMK III 59

[9] "We all know that the body is comprised of a very large number of bones, muscles, nerves, veins and arteries, together with a heart, a brain, a liver, lungs and a stomach. Indeed, we have all at some time or other seen various animals cut open, and been able to look at the shape and arrangement of their insides, which very much resemble our own. " (AT XI 226; CSMK I 315)

animals and man.

But our question remains, if now in slightly better relief: Do the physical movements that are found in animal and man alike, that appear to involve an awareness of specific threats or promises in the external world, already amount to a kind of perception, or is perception exclusively on the side of thought? Is the presence of these mechanisms sufficient as a definition of perception or is perception more than the sum of these mechanisms? Descartes believes that, though they are moved by passions the same as humans and possess perceptual organs, because animals lack the power of representation, we have no reason to believe that they are thinking beings. Nonetheless, if animals do not have perception itself, then at least they share the same *instruments* of perception with human beings. They receive impressions from the external objects and the body itself by means of these instruments and, if by perception we mean a simple seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, and smelling, they react to them as though they perceived them.

In fact, Descartes is very clear on the question of whether perception should be classified as a mode of thought:

> I recognize only two ultimate classes of things: first, intellectual or thinking things, i.e. those which pertain to mind or thinking substance; and secondly, material things, i.e. those which pertain to extended substance or body. Perception, volition and all the modes both of perceiving and of willing are referred to thinking substance; while to extended substance belong size (that is, extension in length, breadth and depth), shape, motion, position, divisibility of component parts and the like.[10] (*Principles*)

In our attempt to grasp Descartes' notion of perception, we have deliberately withheld these comments and others like them. We have done this in order to establish that, regardless of Descartes' views on this question, it is clear that the power of perception in humans is in many ways indistinguishable from whatever its counterpart in animals is. Given that the same outward features of perception can be found in animals, both with regard to their organic instruments and external movements that suggest awareness, we can forgive those who stumble over this question. The confusion follows from the close and intimate union between the mind and the body—so close, in fact, that we are inclined to confuse one for the other. And if our attempt to understand the relation between the mechanisms of perception and perception itself has landed us in confusion,

[10] AT VIIIA 23; CSMK I 208-9

it should not surprise us—*these confusions parallel those of the passions themselves.*

Descartes imagines that the body is a machine that is wholly suited for the purposes of the soul. The bodily machine, though immanently devoid of purpose, functions as an instrument for these purposes. If one mistakes perception for a natural phenomenon it is because of the seemingly perfect fitness between the instruments and mechanisms of nature and thought. The very passions that happen blindly in animals also happen in humans, but can uniquely become objects of perception for them. Perception, then, is the mode of thought that pertains to the body. Because these passions can be understood by the mind that suffers them in terms of their efficient causes, they are candidates for knowledge, and are thus honored with the term perception. Every bodily mechanism that is present to the mind as passion can itself become an object of methodical investigation for the understanding, and it is only through such a process that the causes of the body are rendered increasingly more distinct from those of the mind. As such, the mechanisms that generate passion can be situated more clearly and distinctly among the proper conditions for mental activity. And since this amounts to an overcoming of the immediate confusion of the passions, the mind can then be given more fully to its own purposes.

3. Prejudices and Confusion

There is thus a very specific reason why Descartes needs perception to be a moment of the substantial unity of thought rather than a mechanism of the body: it serves as *intermediary* between the body and the mind, and this for the purposes of the will. The drive to understand the body through perception derives from what Descartes understands to be the mind's rightful supremacy, and it marks an effort to bring the body's powers into perfect alignment with the rational will. The sovereignty of mind over body is our dowry from a higher order of things. While the mind is in principle independent of extension, as long as it is joined to the body in "close and intimate union," it has dominion over it. Life may indeed persist without the mind, but as long as the mind is present to the body, it is within the mind's rights and responsibilities to assert itself over it, and to pursue the establishment of the real order that is concealed beneath a merely apparent disorder. This order is already intuited in the mind itself as general principles or eternal truths, which have their seat in the mind.

When they appear *in concreto* as objects of perception, Descartes says, "Eternal truths are clearly perceived; but, because of preconceived opinions, not all of them are clearly perceived by everyone. [...]because the common notions are in conflict with the preconceived opinions of some people who, as a result, cannot easily grasp them. But the selfsame notions are perceived with the utmost clarity by other people who are free from such preconceived opinions."[11]

From the close and intimate union between mind and body there also issue prejudices that inhibit one from perceiving general principles, thus maintaining the mind in confusion. When the body moves according to its own internal mechanisms, the mind is thrown back on itself. It loses its grip on the body and finds itself confronted only with a chaos of sensations, feelings and impulses that it does not understand. The bodily machine has pulled blindly in its own directions, and apparently without rhyme or reason. Thought responds to these physical disturbances with confused judgments about the causes of the sensations that follow from these movements. And because the judgments are based purely on the movements within the body itself, they do not correspond with true causes. This is exemplified perfectly in the confusion of childhood experience:

> In our early childhood the mind was so closely tied to the body that it had no leisure for any thoughts except those by means of which it had sensory awareness of what was happening to the body. It did not refer these thoughts to anything outside itself, but merely felt pain when something harmful was happening to the body and felt pleasure when something beneficial occurred. And when nothing very beneficial or harmful was happening to the body, the mind had various sensations corresponding to the different areas where, and ways i n which, the body was being stimulated, namely what we call the sensations of tastes, smells, sounds, heat, cold, light, colors and so on - sensations which do not represent anything located outside our thought. 1 At the same time the mind perceived sizes, shapes, motions and so on, which were presented to it not as sensations but as things, or modes of things, existing (or at least capable of existing) outside thought, although it was not yet aware of the difference between things and sensations.[12] (*Principles*)

What Descartes calls 'the prejudices of childhood' follow chiefly from the total immersion of the mind in the instinctual reflex movements by which the mind suffers from, and confuses itself with, the sensations of the body. However clear and vivid the sensations of the child might be, they lack distinctness as long as the mind has not

[11] AT XX 24; CSMK I 209
[12] AT VIIIA 35; CSMK I 218-9

apprehended their genuine efficient causes. Thought has lost itself in the body, and is for the moment incapable of distinguishing between its own sensations and the physical movements outside of itself that have caused these sensations. This confusion will persist until the mind develops its innate capacity for reflecting on the difference between itself and whatever has affected it. Only once it has developed this capacity can it get a grip on the bodily machine and press it into the service of the will. The infant, for example, is not able to separate in his mind the bodily cause of his hunger from its sensation. As such, he suffers from this sensation until one who possesses an understanding of what the child needs arrives to satisfy it. The infant's sensation indeed follows from an urgency to eat within the bodily mechanism itself. But the infant's capacity for relating his unpleasant sensation to a means for overcoming it remains undeveloped. Not only is he unable to relate the specific feeling to the specific bodily need, he is also lacking in both the understanding of what might serve as an appropriate source of sustenance and the motor control facility for procuring it. Slowly, with the help of his parents, the infant begins to relate his sensation to a bodily need, and to this corresponds the development of the motor facility necessary to fulfill it. Together with this process the child has learned to distinguish between different shades of sensation within himself, and likewise to associate with them a motor action that is either adequate for their relief, as in the case of displeasurable sensations, or to their attainment, as in the case of pleasurable ones. And if the infant's needs are not regularly attended to by one who knows how to satisfy them, this entire process of the development of knowledge is retarded. The child is left to his own devices. He is not provided with the appropriate methods by those who already understand them. What we have described are the first, fledgling moments of the development of knowledge, and science is little more than a methodological refinement and extension of this process.[13]

Thus, while the passions immediately issue in confusion for the mind, they do however serve a very important role for the body itself; namely, to "pursue the beneficial and avoid the harmful," and thus to preserve the organism from what assails

[13] "[A]ll human knowledge1 consists solely in clearly distinguishing these notions and attaching each of them only to the things to which it pertains." "All human science consists simply in distinguishing these notions [with regard to extension and thought], and in attributing each of them only to those things to which they pertain." AT III 666; CSMK III 218

it in nature.[14] (*Principles*, §71) What prevents the mind from immediately coming into its rightful possession of the body is an instinct within it that aims primarily at self-preservation. In this regard, the mind can be said to suffer from the needs of the body. But there is more. The instinct for self-preservation, though it initially generates confusion for the mind, also functions to create the conditions for the ascension of the mind to its rightful place as sovereign. As long as the nervous mechanisms of perception are occupied with self-preservation, as long as they are stirred by excessive stimuli, they cannot be taken over as an instrument of understanding and will:

> When some part of our body is harmed, for example when a nerve is irritated, the result is that the part in question ceases to obey our will as it normally does, and sometimes is subject to convulsive movements despite our wishes. This shows that the soul cannot produce any movement in the body without the appropriate disposition of the bodily organs which are required for making the movement. [...] Even the movements we call 'voluntary' occur principally as a result of this disposition of the organs, since, although it is the soul that determines the movements, they cannot be produced without the requisite disposition of the organs, no matter how much we may will this to happen.[15] (*Description of the Human Body and of All of its Functions*)

The body must withdraw itself from threats and distractions as much as possible in order allow reason to come into its own. If the eye is ceaselessly parrying blows from the external world, because it is always compelled to function only as reflex mechanism, it is disallowed from functioning as perceptual instrument of the will. The instinct for self-preservation drives the organism away from violence, and thereby assures that the eye will be available for the uses of the mind. To the actions of this instinct we can trace the incipience of the conditions for meditation with regard to the good. Though the instinct for defense is itself entirely devoid of thought, inasmuch as respite from violence and a kind of affective regularity is necessary for the development of thought, the mind could never be liberated for its own purposes if it weren't for this unthinking instinct. In one moment the eye functions as a part of the mechanism of defense, in the next, once defense is assured, it can be taken over by the will as a perceptual instruments of understanding and reason. With regard to understanding, the eye provides information that can be synthesized with general principles; and with regard to reason broadly, it provides knowledge that increases the minds dominion over the body

[14] AT VIIIA 35; CSMK I 219
[15] AT XI 226; CSMK I 315

for its own purposes. But because these instruments of perception don't think, though they can be taken over by perception, they are not themselves already perceptual in character. If the inborn defensive instinct of the body continues to make its demands of the eye and it functions only as reflex mechanism for this purpose, the eye, having been held back from perception, is thus riveted to the body and scarcely becomes available to the mind. Reason and understanding cannot make their advance. Science does not progress, and the good is lost among a chaos of passions.

4. Descartes Image of Matter and the Body

By way of his attempt to prove that animals are nothing more than machines, Descartes undertakes in *Treatise on Light* to construct in our imagination a "new world." In this world, he assumes "a nature in which there is absolutely nothing that everyone cannot know as perfectly as possible."[16] This perfect knowledge amounts to an ability to create "out of chaos" all of the forms of the old world, whether inanimate or animate, inorganic or organic. Only he who understands the principles of mechanics could reconstruct the human body out of chaos, along with all of the other organisms that populate our world. While other accounts of nature, such as those that derive from Aristotelian vitalism, may not appeal to supernatural causes, these theories do nevertheless suffer from a lack of transparency. They attempt to explain organisms by recourse to invisible souls that mysteriously guide them from potentiality toward actuality.[17] In Descartes' view, the clarity and distinctness that is lacking in finalism can be found in that image of nature in which both inorganic and organic beings alike are held to "always act in strict accordance with the exact laws of mechanics," and in which their movements of can be explained precisely according to these laws in terms of matter in motion. Clarity and distinctness represent for Descartes the regulative ideals of knowledge, and in his view the mechanistic model promises to realize this ideal far better than finalism. The latter's appeal to *purposes*—whether as the immanent potentialities of Aristotle or as the transcendent forms of Plato—at once introduces unnecessary speculative obscurities and renders impossible a knowledge of nature that is validated and confirmed through scientific observation and experiment.

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[16] AT XI 33; CSMK I 90

[17] According to this Aristotelian understanding, nature is thought to be comprised of three kinds of souls: vegetable, sensitive and rational, and animation is attributed to a prime mover.

Descartes' 'new world' is one that is immanently devoid of purposes but for which real material order can be imagined. Unlike the prime matter of the Aristotelians', matter is conceived as divided into "parts" and these parts are nothing more than extended solid bodies that abut one another with no "void" between them. Each of these parts can "receive motions", generating movement between them, which occurs according to the form and configuration of these bodies. "From the first instant of their creation, he causes some to start moving in one direction and others in another, some faster and others slower (or even, if you wish, not at all); and he causes them to continue moving thereafter in accordance with the ordinary laws of nature."[18]

The movements of these parts are measurable displacements that can in principle be abstracted into mathematical theorems. As theorems, the ideal interplay of parts can be clearly imagined independently of considerations with regard to the actual physical characteristics of the material substrate out of which the assemblage of parts is constructed. But while the primary qualities of matter can in principle be mathematically abstracted from one another by the mind, the concrete qualities of solidity, motion, position, size and shape are inextricable bound to one another as essential aspects of extension, and together these primary qualities form the substantial unity that is nature itself.

All material bodies—inanimate or animate, inorganic or organic, man-made or 'natural'—are parts of this substantial unity of nature. This means that even the bodily action of human beings takes place without mental guidance or motive, and can be explained as mechanical movements of pure extension alone:

> This will not seem at all strange to those who know how many kinds of automatons, or moving machines, the skill of man can construct with the use of very few parts, comparison with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and all the other parts that are in the body of any animal. For they will regard this body as a machine which, having been made by the hands of God, is incomparably better ordered than any machine that can be devised by man.[19]

Formerly thought to be the offices of the soul, Descartes renders memory, instinct, and the passions over to definite mechanistic causes, all of which can in principle be observed, measured, calculated and, by availing oneself of the knowledge derived from

[18] AT XI 34; CSMK I 91
[19] AT VI 55-6; CSMK I 139

these efforts, even recreated.[20] As such, Descartes "recognize[s] no difference between the machines made by craftsman and the various bodies that nature alone composes... Everything artificial is also natural."[21]

5. Body and Soul, Clock and Clockmaker

In existing technologies Descartes finds the models according to which one might understand the principles of mechanics that operate in organic bodies, and it is by analogy with these technologies that our understanding of nature advances step by step. "The proper use of models is the basis of scientific thinking...our lack of knowledge of the real mechanisms at work in nature is supplemented by our imagining something analogous to mechanisms which we know, which could perhaps exist in nature and be responsible for the phenomenon that we observe."[22] (*Principles*, VIII) To illustrate the fundamental laws of motion, for example, he refers to the transmission of movement in a vat of pressed grapes, the juice of which moves like an ether, or the bouncing of a tennis ball to illustrate the phenomenon of refraction, or the sling to illustrate that of what physicists would later call potential and kinetic energy. As a model for the functioning of the organism, Descartes turns to clocks, pipe organs and water mills, all of which operate according to these same laws of motion, but which also exhibit a higher degree of configuration, assemblage and order than the simple mechanisms that he uses to illustrate fundamental principles.

Taking the original organisms of the old world as the models for the human machines of his new world, the perfect knower would discover within the chaos of the new world all of the necessary building blocks, and through a process of reverse engineering, he could manufacture these mechanism so perfectly that they would be materially identical to those of our world.

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[20] "I should like you to consider that all these functions follow naturally in this machine simply from the arrangement of its organs, no more or less than the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from that of its counterweights and wheels, so that it is not at all necessary for their explanation to conceive in it any other soul, vegetative or sensitive, or any other principle of motion and life other than its blood and its spirits, set in motion by the heat of the fire that burns continually in its heart, and which is of a nature no different from all fires in inanimate bodies." AT XI 202; CSMK I 108

[21] AT VIII(a) 326; CSMK I 288

[22] AT X 395; CSMK I 29

> These men will be composed, as we are, of a soul and a body. First I must describe the body on its own; then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show how these two natures would have to be joined and united in order to constitute men who resemble us. I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us. Thus God not only gives it externally the colors and shapes of all the parts of our bodies, but also places inside it all the parts required to make it walk, eat, breathe, and indeed to imitate all those of our functions which can be imagined to proceed from matter and to depend solely on the disposition of our organs. We see clocks, artificial fountains, mills, and other such machines which, although only man-made, have the power to move of their own accord in many different ways. But I am supposing this machine to be made by the hands of God, and so I think you may reasonably think it capable of a greater variety of movements than I could possibly imagine in it, and of exhibiting more artistry than I could possibly ascribe to it. [23] (*Treatise on Man*)

Just as our existing technologies are thought to be the concrete expression of theorems that are clearly understood, organisms are also held to be only the concrete expressions of theorems that are, at least for the moment, poorly understood. Descartes has projected into the heart of nature the logical and chronological priority of techno-scientific understanding in order to circumvent the obscurities of finalism. Rather than being endowed with mysterious faculties, Descartes' perfect knower is nothing more than a great engineer who, because He initially created the universe, must first perfectly understand its laws. After the once-and-for-all establishment of these laws, what distinguishes man from God is not the insuperable finitude of human understanding so much as a kind of techno-scientific ignorance. If there is nothing, *ab initio*, that separates the mind of God from that of man but the latter's current state of practical ignorance, this is not only because the causes that hold in this new world are in principle entirely comprehensible by man, but also because, using the same materials, they could in principle be *duplicated*, providing only that man possesses the sufficiently clear and distinct understanding of the laws of nature to accomplish it. Given the means and the time, man could overcome this rift by his industry and resolve alone, and as man's knowledge advances, the cleavage between god and man progressively narrows. Thus does man approach perfection.

[23] AT XI 119-120; CSMK I 99

6. Finalism under the Cloak of Mechanism—The Proliferation of Purposes

We can see that Descartes envisions the organism to be more than a mere mechanical relation of parts that can be explained entirely in terms of blind causal relations. The analogy with the technologies of man-made machines must be extended further. While these products of human ingenuity have certainly not emerged according to purposes that are immanent to the extended substance out of which they are made, they do nevertheless serve a *purpose* for those that create and use them. It is with a view to the purpose of milling wheat that the water mill was invented, as a means of making the process more efficient and reducing the amount of human labor involved. As long as man-made machines represent the model according to which the organism is understood, the order that we find in the organism cannot be comprehended except by reference to its prior conception in the mind of a designer. The same can be said of the clock, or any other man-made machine for that matter. Just as the order and function of the clock is understood by reference to the idea in the mind of the clockmaker, so also will we understand the order and function of the organism according to an idea of its creator. It is no doubt true that Descartes has driven purpose from the internal workings of the organism-machine, but only in such a way that they reappear in the mind of the engineer who first imagines and then fashions it. As Canguilhem points out:

> With the Cartesian explanation, in spite of appearances, we have not taken a single step outside finalism. The reason is that mechanism can explain everything so long as we take machines as already granted, but it cannot account for the construction of machines. No machine builds machines.[24]

Though Descartes' new world is one in which matter possesses no immanent finalities, it is not for this reason devoid of sense. Where, other than from purposes conceived by their maker, can the machines of this world derive their meaning and function? Purpose has merely been transformed into functionality, and in this way finalism is surreptitiously reinserted into nature under the cloak of mechanism.

In Descartes' view, the clock, along with all man-made machines, operates according to the exact same natural laws as the movement of the heavens. And like the

[24] Canguilhhem, G. (2008). *Knowledge of Life.* (S. Geroulanos, & D. Ginsburg, Trans.) Fordham: Fordham University Press. p. 87

clock, the astronomer can also use the movement of the heavenly bodies to track time. In an analogy such as this we discover another key to understanding what is problematic about Descartes mechanical image of the universe: the machine is distinct from the heavenly bodies in the way that it serves *exclusively* as a means—in our example of the clock, as a means for keeping time for humans. While the observation of heavenly bodies can also be used to track time, who would be foolish enough to propose a total reduction of these movements to this function? We can put to Descartes this same question regarding the relationship between the movements of the body and the function of providing the conditions for consciousness and judgment: is it not just as foolish to claim that the latter is the body's ultimate function as it is to claim that keeping time is the ultimate function of the movement of the heavenly bodies?

The answer to the question of why Descartes views the body in terms of this univocal functionality rests with the cogito. Because he believes that he has established the priority and supremacy of consciousness, he searches retrogressively for the *conditions* of this supremacy, and finds them straightaway in a body that, because it is other to consciousness, already presents itself as an instrument and a means for it. Just as the mind exists originally as a unified soul, the body exists originally as an instrument for the mind. This duality between the means on one side and the end on the other is not understood to be the product of a movement of becoming or a dynamic development. The body does not *become* an instrument any more than the soul *becomes* a mind—having been created by God*, each is what it is essentially*. As such, the body can never be interpreted or understood except as a mode of functionality and a means for carrying out the directives of judgment.

Descartes' functionalist view of the organism has important implications for how we understand health: fitness, strength and good health are conceived by analogy to the well-designed, well-oiled machine. Descartes was not unaware of the implication of his mechanistic image of nature for sickness and health: "My thought compares a sick man and an ill-made clock with my idea of a healthy man and a well-made clock," adding that, this is "only a simple denomination," entirely "external." [25] This qualification regarding the externality of the judgment that the machine functions incorrectly refers us once again to Descartes' dualist cosmology. Because both the broken clock and the working clock follow the same natural laws, only a consciousness that exists beyond

[25] AT VII 85; CSMK II 59

these laws in a sort of God-like remove could make such a judgment regarding whether the machine functions as it should. Whether we refer to the clock or the organism-machine, it falls to the one for whom the mechanism is supposed to function to judge that it is broken and what is wrong with it. As for fixing it, only the one who understands the design and method of the machine's construction will possess the wherewithal and the knowhow to be effective in this effort. Because this method finds its basis in the principles according to which the entire universe operates, the repairman needn't be initiated to some obscure or arcane art. He has only to understand these general principles clearly and distinctly enough to be capable of their methodic application.

From these observations we can conclude that, for Descartes, an important criterion for determining the difference between the healthy and the sick, the well-made and the ill-made, relates to whether or not the machine fulfills the function assigned to it by its' user or designer. But this is not all. In our example of the clock, for example, that it works correctly *for the moment* is not sufficient as a standard by which to judge functionality. If the lock keeps the time perfectly for a few days and then stops working, this suggests that it was poorly made, and on this basis we may raise questions about the care or the expertise with which it was manufactured. Another important factor by which we assess the functionality of the mechanism is *durability*. The good clock functions regularly for many years before it must be replaced. Likewise, the well-made organism-machine must fulfill this criterion of durability.

7. Conclusion: Cartesian Science and the Instrumentalization of the Body

A very specific notion of *chaos* emerges from this. If the one who perfectly understands the principles of mechanics can reconstruct the human body out of chaos, along with all of the other organisms that populate our world, then chaos, here, means nothing more than *disorder* or *disarray* among material beings. It denotes a sort of cosmic untidiness, and it falls to the perfect knower/engineer to bring to this messy universe a real and proper order. Chaos, in this sense, only marks the moment before order is brought to disorder. This is a disorder that lends itself to order—one must simply know its principles, and on this basis one can construct the method to bring it about. In this sense, matter goes naturally together with the only order there is; namely,

that which derives from images, ideas or concepts. Without the essential order of the mind, the contingent disarray of material being could not appear as such, and it is for this that reason matter cannot be reduced to mind or mind to matter. While body and mind, flesh and spirit, chaos and order are substantially different, each goes together with the other as night goes together with day.

The cogito, in Descartes' view, provides the indubitable foundation of all scientific understanding. The image of the body emerges together with the broad orientation of scientific investigation. This is because the body represents both the instrument and object of scientific research. If it seems that the essential structure of the bodily instrument by which scientific research is executed delimits and structures the content of scientific concepts, this is only because this instrument, like all extended objects, is imagined to emerge as the hypostatization of innate mathematical and geometrical knowledge. As instrument, the body provides the necessary conditions for conscious engagement with the extended world. As object, it realizes in concrete form the principles of geometry that first intensionally present themselves as ideas within consciousness. The body as object validates and demonstrates the priority of these principles, while the body as instrument serves as a vehicle for this effort.

Just as the clockmaker methodically investigates the broken clock for the cause of its malfunction, the psychiatrist methodically investigates the sick body for whatever undermines judgment or disturbs consciousness. He takes the body as the object of his investigations, but only so that it can be ultimately restored to its normal functionality and in turn reinserted into the instrumental complex over which judgment and consciousness exert their authority.

FREUD

2

An Introduction to Freud's Early Attempt at an Eliminative Materialist Psychology

The careful reader of Sigmund Freud's early pre-psychoanalytical monograph, *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* (henceforth *The Project*) finds in this text the first formulation of ideas that would become central to his later psychoanalytical understanding of mental phenomena.[1] Nevertheless, throughout his life, Freud continued to maintain that a purely literal, scientific account of mental phenomenon would be superior to the largely figurative accounts that he offers in the psychoanalytical works for which he is most famous. In this regard, Freud is an early pioneer of what Patricia Churchland has called "eliminative materialism," which strives to realize the regulative ideal of a cognitive theory based entirely upon a physiological account of mental phenomenon and to eliminate every vestige of "folk psychology."[2]

Due to the crudeness of his era's scientific understanding of the structure and functions of the nervous system, Freud would later abandon this early attempt to ground psychological theory in a purely physiological account of the body. An analysis of the neurological mechanisms of the human mind such as that of *The Project*—while both interesting as hypothesis and suggestive of a direction for medical and psychopharmacological experimentation—proved inadequate both from a clinical and a theoretical standpoint.

Even if Freud's discoveries in *The Project* were true, given the primitiveness of

[1] Freud, S. (2001). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 1). New York City, NY: Viking.
[2] Churchland, P. (1986). *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain.*

the surgical methods and psychopharmacological drugs of the time, it would have been difficult to alter the mechanisms of the pathological nervous system for the better through these techniques alone.[3] To be sure, such a purely physiological approach to the pathologies of mental phenomenon as that of *The Project* continues to this day to be inadequate. Nonetheless, in its discussion of the biological function of thought, speech, and dreams, *The Project* does begin to open the door to another avenue for therapeutic intervention: the 'talking cure.' And some variety of this technique remains an important aspect of any effective psychological treatment to this day.

But ours is not a clinical interest, and so the inefficacy of this work from a clinical standpoint should not detour us. Rather, what interests us is the way that Freud found himself on the outer frontiers of physical science, compelled by the demands of his project to venture what can only be called *philosophical* conceits regarding the mechanisms of mental phenomena. In one of his letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Freud expressed his frustration with finding himself on these frontiers: he complained that he was led from an explanation of mechanisms that seemed at the outset to be within the purview of positive science toward, as he put it, "an explanation of something from the very center of nature."[4] Though it draws on the cutting edge of contemporaneous neurology, *The Project* is nonetheless a highly theoretical attempt to articulate many of his earliest, most original insights—the very same that would continue to figure largely in the construction of psychological theories for the remainder of his life: the unconscious, perception, consciousness, the ego, the function of dreams and of language.

Still, this is not our sole interest in this essay. Freud's text interests us because of the rather powerful account of pain that he offers there. From the beginning, Freud's main goal in *The Project* was to offer a compelling account of defense. We learn that pain is not simply a pathological phenomenon, but something that, through its reverberations in memory, plays an essential role in determining the normal functioning of the human organism. Pain represents a shock to the nervous system and involves an afflux of violent energies that break through the protective barriers of the

[3] In an 1884 Viennese medical journal, Freud enthusiastically endorsed experimentation with cocaine for its psychopharmacological applications. Not long after this, convinced of its almost miraculous curative powers, he prescribed it to his friend and collegue Fleischl-Marxow to help remedy his morphine addiction. Fleischl-Marxow would later die a slow and painful death. This episode probably made Freud more cautious of the pitfalls of pharmacological experimentation.

[4] Freud, S. (2001). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 1). New York City, NY: Viking. p. 248

ego, destabilizing and, in some measure, forever altering it. In short, it marks the moment of the failure of the defenses that the organism has established against the external world. This failure, we will soon see, implies the disruption to the very structures that assure a balanced economy of forces within the nervous system. When the homeostasis of the neurological substructure of psychic phenomena is established, a sense of meaning and value can emerge. And to the degree that this this balance of forces within the nervous system represents a condition for the sustainment of our sense of meaning and value, any disruptions to this balance threaten to throw the psyche into chaos, thus undermining one's sense of value and meaning. Pain is explained as the sensation of this disruption.

1. The Organism vis-à-vis its Environment, Itself

Every flow of energy—psychic and physical alike—must be accounted for in a way that can in principle be translated into the terms of physics. Freud states thatit is only if we "represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles" that we might "render those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction."[5] Indeed, there is nothing in nature, including man, which does not act in accordance with definite natural laws. Freud's universe is a purely mechanistic one, and securing the freedom of the human organism from these mechanisms is as remote from his concerns as is providing it with a normative framework for action. If such a thing as freedom exists (the term does not appear once in *The Project*), it is restricted to a choice of where to direct these energies, whether to store them up or to release them in reflex action. Thus, between the organism and its inert material environment there is not a difference of kind, but solely one of organizational complexity.

Rather than endeavoring to explain the evolutionary process by which the human organism has distinguished itself from other organisms and, more broadly, from the general mechanisms of the material world, Freud's approach is morphological—that is, he sets out to explain the economy of forces that operate within the neurological structures with which human beings have already by evolution been endowed. Mainly, this will involve explaining how the organism establishes and maintains a restricted

[5] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 297

economy of forces vis-à-vis the external world. We can formulate the driving questions of *The Project* in this way: how does the human organism endure as an integral being and a system unto itself? What mechanisms must be in place for this organism to protect itself against disintegration in the face of the overwhelming forces of the external world? What is the normal functioning of this organism in view of this drive to endure and to protect itself against destruction?

In order to answer these questions, Freud proposes that there are two main functions—one "mechanical" and one "biological"—according to which the neurological system operates, and defines the basic neurological substance over which these functions hold sway. "Neurones" represent the organic material particles that comprise the nervous system. And, as indicated above, Freud thinks that the neurological systems can be explained by exclusive recourse to quantities of force, or what he calls *Q*. Excitations in the neurones are caused by *Q* in flow. Both functions determine how the organism react against and manage these flows of quantity. The first function unfolds according to what Freud calls, *the principle of neuronal inertia*. Quite simply, it states that neurones tend to divest themselves of *Q*.[6] Freud likely has a variation on the first law of thermodynamics in mind here. Just like any closed physical system, a neurological system is characterized by an optimal constancy of energy. While it does store a quantity of potential energy that can be expended in action (we will speak of this in terms of the biological function in a moment), this internal quantity, or *Qn*, is relatively low by comparison with the *Q* of the external world. When excessive quantities of energy are exerted on the neurological system from the outside, these quantities must be divested in order to preserve its integrity.

It should be clear that the mechanical principle according to which the primary function of the organism works is one that not only characterizes organisms, but also applies more broadly to inert matter. Just as the cue ball's impact upon another billiard ball immediately causes it to move, so too does the impact of something that is external to the neurological system cause immediate and proportionate changes to it. Provided that the external aggression is not too great, resulting in the destruction of the integrity of the organism, these immediate reactions express themselves as reflex movements. The physical laws according to which these movements take place are not in principle dissimilar to those of inert material objects. Reflex movement, like the reaction of the

[6] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 296

billiard ball, is a simple giving-off of energy that maintains an optimal constancy of energy within the nervous system. In both the case of the billiard ball and that of the organism there is a direct proportionality between the force of the cause and that of the effect, only in the case of the organism this proportionality is internalized as a relation between the intensity of the excitation (cause) and the effort necessary for flight from this excitation (effect). Thus, in truth there are two levels at which the external aggression can effect the organism; one which is perfectly analogous to that of the cue ball and the billiard ball, in which there is a simple and violent impact upon the periphery and another which, while much more complex, likewise involves a proportionate transference of *Q* from the excitation to the reaction. That the reaction of an organism appears spontaneous and unpredictable has more to do with the immense internal complexity of these mechanisms than with any fundamental difference between organisms and inert material objects. When this complexity breaks down because of a violent impact the apparent unpredictability disappears, the vital differential between the periphery and the center is collapsed, and the organism is reduced to inert matter—all of which marks a failure of the primary function.

This keeping-off of external *Q* is the primary function of the nervous system, and as we have seen this involves a complex operation whereby it translates *Q* into reflex movement. But this is not all. Though the external world is the ultimate origin of all quantities, as long as the organism is alive there are internal quantities, or *Qn*, at work as well. Freud is succinct on this point:

> The nervous system receives stimuli from the somatic element itself—endogenous stimuli—which have equally to be discharged. These have their origin in the cells of the body and give rise to the major needs: hunger, respiration, sexuality. From these the organism cannot withdraw as it does from external stimuli; it cannot employ their *Q* for flight from the stimulus. They only cease subject to particular conditions, which must be realized in the external world.[7]

These internal, endogenous stimuli demand that the organism go beyond its primary function. The exigencies of life transcend the simple keeping-off of *Q*. While the primary function is one of reaction against the external world, the secondary function involves the management of a *Qn* sufficient to sustain the organism as a complex system unto itself. Since the organism is dependent upon the external world

[7] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 297

for this sustainment, it must actively go forth into this world in order to secure its needs. It risks itself in this going forth, thus subjecting itself to forces that could overwhelm it, from which it must in turn withdraw in order to preserve itself. In extreme cases, nothing less than its very survival is at stake. Thus, the organism is characterized by relentless vacillations between a defensive withdrawal from the overwhelming powers of the external world and the necessary risk of self-assertion within it. It is clear that, for Freud, the key to normalcy lies in precisely a balance between these two functions. If one overpowers the other, what occurs is a pathological aberration from the natural and normal functioning of the organism that threatens its integrity.

2. Memory

But how do these processes play out within the cells of the nervous system? What structures must be in place in order for the organism to fulfill its primary and secondary functions? Freud proposes a theory that is remarkable in its similarities with our contemporary understanding of how the nerve cells work. The neuronal networks "have contact with one another through the medium of a foreign substance, which terminate upon one another as they do upon portions of foreign tissue, and in which certain lines of conduction are laid down in so far as [the neurones] receive [excitations] through cell-processes [dendrites] and [give them off] through an axis-cylinder [axon]."[8] According to the demands of the primary and secondary functions outlined above, not only must the nervous system be capable of the transmission of *Qn* along certain lines of conduction, but it must also be capable of the retainment of a *Qn* that can function as a reserve for action. This means that, internal to the cell, between the movement from dendrite to axon there must be a sort of trough or container that is capable of retaining a measure of *Qn*. It is here that we find the origins of the concept of cathexis. Later, Freud will transplant this concept into the domain of psychoanalysis, but in this context it is merely a further development of his understanding of the neurone itself. A further feature of the neuronal theory concerns the transmission of these energies between the cells. For this, Freud suggests that the neurones are divided from one another by "contact barriers."[9] These contact barriers are at once viscous and

[8] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 298
[9] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 300

permeable, capable of both containing small measures of *Qn* through resistance and giving way to measures that are strong enough to break through these resistances. These ruptures leave in their wake traces in the contact barriers, and act as grooves or "facilitations" for the direction of subsequent flows.

It is in this way that Freud accounts for memory. Though it might be tempting to assert that the nervous tissue is merely the material substrate of memory, this would be incorrect. The facilitations in the contact barriers between abutting neurones are the very substance of memory. Thus, as traces of the physical pressures exerted upon the organism from without (*Q*) and the vital strivings to survive that arise from within (*Qn*), memory is not an epiphenomenon of brain activity but its very material essence. Furthermore, insofar as facilitation represents the essence of memory, we can say that we do not remember forces as such any more than the bed of the stream 'remembers' the flows of freshwater that carved it out. We merely retain a permanent impression of the impact that these exciting forces had upon us, without ever knowing these forces in and of themselves. "The memory of an experience (that is, its continuing operative power)," Freud declares, "depends on a factor which is called the magnitude of the impression and the frequency with which the same impression is repeated." (p. 300) Just as the quantity of freshwater determines the depth and contours of the streambed, so too does the magnitude of *Qn* determine the degree to which the contact barriers are facilitated. Furthermore, the frequency with which *Qn* breaks through the cell walls increases the ease with which it passes. If small magnitudes of *Qn* regularly pass through the facilitation, this will have the same effect as comparatively larger magnitudes passing through with less frequency.

3. Perception

Within this description of the role that the frequency and magnitude of *Qn* play in determining facilitation, a difference between two types of neurones emerges—namely, the difference between perceptual and mnemic cells. The organism must be adaptable to changing external conditions, and in order to account for the readiness that the organism exhibits for fresh and new excitations, there must be cells that are unalterable and exhibit no traces of the forces that were acting upon the organism from one moment to the next.

> There are two classes of neurones: (1) those which allow *Q* through as though they had no contact barriers and which, accordingly, after each passage of excitation are in the same state as before, and (2) those whose contact barriers make themselves felt, so that they only allow *Qn* to pass through with difficult or partially. The latter class may, after each excitation, be in a different state from before and they thus afford the possibility of representing memory.[10]

But how does this distinction relate to the frequency and magnitude with which the neurone undergoes quantities of force? While it is possible that these two classes of neurones develop genetically in the womb as a pure endowment of evolution, we should also consider another possibility; namely, that memory and perceptual neurones were at one time—perhaps in the womb, perhaps in the earliest moments of the separation from the mother—structurally identical, and that it is their exposure to *Q* that modified them such that they ultimately developed into their own respective systems. In order to understand why this hypothesis is justified, we will need to take a closer look at the distinction between perceptual neurones, which together form the system φ, and memory neurones, which together form the system ψ.

We noted above that memory is a function of facilitations that originate in the rupture of the contact barriers, and that these ruptures occur as a result of the pressures that are exerted upon them from either side. Recall that the nervous system has two functions, one biological, which involves the retainment of a store of *Qn* sufficient to act upon the exigencies of life, and one mechanical, which involves keeping off *Q*. The former, involving the reception of endogenous stimuli, is oriented internally, toward the organic systems themselves. The latter operates at the periphery of the organism and takes its orientation from the external world, from which the most powerful forces are exerted.[11] This system φ that keeps off *Q* at the periphery of the organism is identified with the spinal column and the networks of nerve endings that extend to the extremities of the body. The system ψ, which is responsible for managing internal *Qn*, consists of nerve cells that extend directly to the interior of the body from the sympathetic ganglion of the brain itself. Thus, insofar as endogenous stimuli are much less intense than exogenous stimuli, the magnitudes to which the memory cells are subjected are

[10] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 299

[11] "There is no question but that the external world is the origin of all major quantities of energy since," Freud asserts, "according to the discoveries of physics, it consists of powerful masses which are in violent motion and which transmit their motion." *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 304

comparatively lower than those of the perceptual cells. This means that the contact barriers of the nerve cells that extend to the interior of the body are not subject to the same magnitudes as those of the ones that extend to the periphery. Not only are the magnitudes to which the latter are subjected greater, but the frequency with which they are bombarded with external Q is greater as well. The contact barriers of system φ have been all but washed away. From this, it can be concluded that perceptual neurones are nothing more than memory neurones that are highly facilitated, such that they no longer show subtle traces. Rather, they have been flattened out by the Q of the impressions of the external world. Because of the relentlessness of external forces and the irreversibility of the total facilitations that result from them, these perceptual cells are now unalterable—their capacity to record traces of Q has been totally effaced, and it is this that makes possible the readiness of the organism to constantly receive fresh impressions from one moment to the next that characterizes perception.

Now that we have seen what separates memory neurones from perceptual neurones, it should be clear that they represent the two extremes of a spectrum. On one side of the spectrum we have memory neurones, the facilitations of which involve a lower proportions of frequency and magnitude, and on the other side, we have perceptual neurones, whose facilitations involve comparably higher proportions. One is oriented outward, is characterized by receptivity, and involves the automatic reactions to the external world. The other is oriented inward, is characterized by a purely vital activity, and is occupied with the sustainment of the biological operations of the organism itself. And it is clear that these observations match with our experiences as well. As a pure form of receptivity to the movements of the external world, perception requires no active effort on our behalf. Perception never stops, except of course when the organism restores itself in the internal mechanisms of sleep according to the biological function. Remembering or relearning, on the other hand, often requires a kind of probing effort, and on the basis of the above description, this can be explained as an effort to discover and retrace low intensity facilitations.

4. Frequency—Habit

But what about rote memory and habit? Though Freud makes no explicit remarks on this matter in *The Project*, we can extrapolate how this question might be answered within the schema developed there. Let us make a few general observations upon habit and see what can be understood on this basis. The first thing that strikes us about habits is the way that they are characterized by a certain insistence and lack of flexibility. Once established, the habit reasserts itself somewhat forcefully, and becomes a kind of structure within which we operate in our daily lives. If it is my habit to rise in the morning at a certain hour, then this will at least to some degree determine the rhythm of my life and configure my days from without. By this we simply mean that habit is, from the standpoint of experience, marked by a certain monotony and externality. It is something that quietly endures as a compulsion or internal rhythm. From this standpoint, the habit appears to be automatic. That is, when we are seized with this compulsion, the habit seems timeless, necessary and unalterable. Furthermore, because an act is habitual, we often do not remember doing it. Why, if not because habitual acts have the character of automatic mechanisms, do we forget whether we locked the door to our house, only to find upon returning that our anxieties were unfounded? But with some effort, our habits can be changed. If I want to alter my sleeping schedule, for instance, this will require the effort not only to set an alarm, but also to resist the powerful impulse to turn it off when it goes off in the morning. Only in this way can the habit be reconfigured. From this standpoint, the habit always exhibits a certain changeability, however difficult it might be to initiate.

Let us now attempt to understand these observations within the schema outlined above. Where on the neurological spectrum would habitual memory lie? It is our hypothesis that habitual memory can be situated somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, intermediate between memory neurones and perceptual neurones. Like perception, the specific habitual act is mechanical and often not remembered within experience. Like remembering, the initiation of the habit often (though not in every case) requires deliberate and specific effort. It is as if, after creating the initial facilitations, the organism must attentively retrace them until the contact barriers have reached a degree of permeability at which the *Qn* flows with ease through them, and deliberate effort is no longer necessary. Furthermore, it is repetition, or the high

frequency of facilitation that ensures that the habit will endure. Thus, habits are not quite mechanical reflexes—they are memories that have become automatic. What is more, when we account for the way in which the system φ unfolds according to the defensive, mechanical (primary) function of the organism and system ψ the active, biological (secondary) function, we can also conclude that this middle ground between them marks a point of convergence at which these two functions meet, whether in concert or conflict.

Before returning to our exposition of the concepts that Freud explicitly develops within *The Project*, let us follow this line of questioning concerning habit a bit further. From where does the initial impetus for the cultivation of habitual repetition come? From the external world, according to the mechanical function? Or from the depths of the organism itself, according to the biological function? Can these questions even be answered by simple recourse to one or the other of these functions? Clearly we cannot offer a single, definitive answer to these questions for all habits. Some appear to arise through the biological function in accordance with the exigencies of life, and still others through the mechanical function, as a way of keeping off external *Q*. One thing that we can say with some certitude regarding habits is this: irrespective of their impetus, they concern the outward relation of the organism to its environment. This indicates that, at least from the standpoint of their efficient cause, habits are essentially mechanical. Indeed, a habit such as that of eating at a specific hour lends rhythm and regularity to the biological drives. One adopts a habit such as this in order to keep the pressures of hunger at manageable levels and to impose regularity. This cannot be separated from the whole ensemble of biological demands, on the one side, and mechanical ones, on the other. If one's responsibilities—that is, demands coming from the external world—are great, one will feel a greater compulsion to impose this habitual rhythm and regularity on these biological needs. If one is relatively free from external compulsions, one can get away with eating simply when one is hungry—that is, according to the vagaries of the will. The same holds for the sultan who, because he has a harem of women at his disposal, can freely follow the ebbs and flows of his sexual desire. In principle, the biological function could place the somatic element almost entirely at its disposal, thereby gaining nearly total reign over it. Eat when you want, have sex when you want, and sleep when you want—exist, in short, at the summit of a primordial freedom from the demands of the external world, luxuriating in the

impulses.

Now consider the example of military discipline. This is a case in which the impetus clearly comes from the outside. By compelling the army trainee to a seemingly endless repetition of drills, the sergeant conditions him to act according to the specific protocols of military practice. Eventually, these protocols should become like second nature and, one can hope, the soldier's habits will endure even the extreme duress of battle, making his behavior in these situations almost entirely predictable. The responsibilities of the army private are enormous, not only in terms of the demands that come from his superiors, but also the forces from which he must protect himself on the battlefield. He is assailed on all sides by these forces, and can barely find respite to attend to his own biological needs. For this reason, a time in which to meet these needs is meticulously circumscribed, whether it is eating in the mess hall at a specific hour, or the weekend of rest and relaxation away from the battlefront. Everything is carefully calculated to maintain the optimal balance and rhythm of forces so that the soldier remains battle-ready.

Until now, we have defined system ψ as existing on the biological side of the organism. Its facilitations were said to arise through the endogenous lines of conduction that connect with the internal organs of the body. As the mainspring of the psychical mechanism, this system provides the motive to the somatic element toward fulfillment of the exigencies of life. But our discussion of military discipline has revealed an important feature of mnemic cells. While memory cells are impacted by Qn coming from endogenous lines of conduction, they also record traces coming from exogenous stimuli. In order to establish the original facilitations between memory neurones, the imposition of a habit always requires an initial, moderate violence to the nervous system—and this violence most often comes as a demand upon the organism from the outside. (The first weeks of military boot camp exemplify this initial violence.) Thus, because of their specificity and relentlessness, external motives can press the mechanical function toward further development, which involves the penetration of moderate Q deeper into the neurological system and a corresponding development of higher complexity according to which the organism is able to defend itself more fully against external Q. After the facilitations between the mnemic image of the situation that calls for specific action and the motor image of this action are established, then it is simply a matter of retracing these facilitation with great frequency in order to transform

what is initially a simple memory into an automatic reaction. As the frequency increases, so too does the mechanization of memory, until at some point, the composite of the situation and the act demanded by it appear to be irreversibly joined, and the specific habitual behavior becomes 'second nature.'

It should be clear from our discussion that the somatic element can be understood as the primordial field of conflict between the two functions. Habits serve to impose rhythm and regularity on the pressures—external and internal—by which the nervous system is beset, thus tipping the scales in this conflict toward defense. Insofar as a specific habit concerns the regulation of internal, endogenous stimuli, it represents a repetitional movement of subordination by which these biological demands are made to wait until (1) preservation is assured and (2) an appropriate object for the fulfillment of biological needs is present. Insofar as a specific habit concerns the manner in which I respond to the violent forces of the external world (of battle, for instance), it represents a repetitional movement in which the primary demand of defense is situationally structured and reinforced. Now we can understand the order that Freud attributes to the functions. If the organism fails to keep off external *Q* through the mechanical or primary function, then this compromises the integrity of the entire organism, and destroys the possibility of meeting the exigencies of life according to the secondary function.

5. Magnitude—Pain

It is true that the building-up of a second nature can be seen as a restriction on the development of further complexity, if only because this movement involves a routinization of specific reactions vis-à-vis the external world. The repetitious retracing of facilitations between the same mnemic and motor images makes it possible for the organism to act identically under similar circumstances throughout time. Because an established habit retards the development of new facilitations, this would seem to inhibit the organism from learning new ways of reacting to its environment. But as long as the environment continues to present no extreme challenges to the integrity of the organism, the plateauing of the developmental movement can be seen as a mark of the *success* of the habit for keeping off pressures. It suggests that the organism is somewhat well adapted to its environment, existing in relative symbiosis. The active building-up of

habit serves as a means of binding the organism against the pressures with which it must contend in its regular environment and of managing those that arise from endogenous stimuli. It endures these external pressures unscathed both because of its habitual facility for the mechanized transversal of external forces that exhibit figurational similarities and the finalization of an internal negotiation between primary and secondary functions, thus ensuring not only its own immediate survival, but also its longevity.

If because of an increase in violence within this environment there is a partial failure of habitual contrivances to keep off external *Q*, an immediate reduction in the capacities of the organism vis-à-vis its environment will ensue. As we will see later, this is most apparent in the diminished ability of consciousness for qualitative discrimination, but this represents only the first, inwardly evident stage in such a movement of reduced complexity. How shall we understand this momentary degeneration of complexity? The key lies in an understanding of pain. Freud writes:

> We have found that the major external *Q*s are kept off from φ and still more from ψ by the nerve-ending screens [of the epidermis, for example], and by the merely indirect connection between ψ and the external world. Is there a phenomenon which can be brought to coincide with the failure of these contrivances? Such, I think, is *pain*...The nervous system has the most decided inclination to a flight from pain. We see in this a manifestation of the primary trend against a raising of *Qn* tension, and we infer that pain consists in the irruption of large *Q*s into ψ.[12]

Because of their strength, external quantities of high magnitude press the mechanical function beyond its capabilities, and these forces penetrate into the depths of memory. However, up to a certain point, the organism has ways of protecting itself from large quantities that encroach upon it by way of φ . Firstly, the body is equipped by evolution with the nerve-ending coverings of the epidermis, which act in the manner of a sieve. In this way, low *Q*s from the external world are neutralized, and objectively, in terms of the naked forces as they are measured by physics, the nervous system is subject only to medium or high quantities—that is, to quantities that are powerful enough to penetrate these sieves. Those medium quantities that do penetrate these coverings enter the nervous system through φ and are released in a proportionate reflex action, whether as a function of evolutionary endowment or, as we discussed above, as habitual memories

[12] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 305

that are built up through deliberate effort. Depending upon their strength, higher quantities will not only provoke reflex action but, insofar as there is a disproportion between the external aggression and the reflex, these quantities will make their way into the depths of the nervous system. But rather than succumbing to the direct impact of external *Q* of high magnitudes, the nervous system reacts by breaking these forces up into smaller *Q*s and distributing them as smaller facilitations throughout ψ. The higher the quantity in φ, the more facilitations in system ψ that it will leave in its wake. This means that quantity expresses itself as complication in ψ.

In this manner, whenever the external world exerts enough force to reduce the organism to the simplicity of brute matter, the organism reacts with an effort to compensate for this immediate reduction in complexity through further complexification in ψ, thus distributing the impact throughout an entire region of the memory neurones. By analogy, one can think of the impact of a stone upon an automobile's windshield. Only because the force of the impact is distributed throughout the windshield as a web of cracks does it retain its overall integrity. Just as the force of the impact corresponds with the range of distribution of cracks in the window, so too do the specific magnitudes with which the organism is assailed correspond with the range of facilitations. The greater the magnitude coming from the world, the more the organism will stress itself in building up complexity within ψ, frantically dividing these quantities up and distributing them along a multiplicity of lines. Thus, this complication has the effect of immediately dampening the impact of *Q*. When the organism reaches the limit of its facility for handling these forces through complication, then these *Q*s will no longer distribute, and will leave heavy facilitations behind in ψ , "as though there had been a stroke of lightning." These traces are precisely the neurological marks of a damaging trauma. Going forward, they cannot but remain extremely sensitive. And as mutilations in the nervous tissue that refuse to heal, they will be forever associated with the object that excited the pain. Freud even goes so far as to suggest that it could be that these facilitations "do away with the resistance of the contact barriers entirely and establish pathways of conduction as there are in φ."[13]

[13] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 307

6. Period—Quality

Of course this conflict between internal and external forces is not necessarily one that is conscious as such. And it is entirely necessary to go beyond the purview of consciousness to explain the complex relations of the organism both to itself and to the external world. Freud writes:

> We are prepared to find that some of our assumptions are not confirmed through consciousness. If we do not let ourselves be confused on that account, it follows, from the postulate of consciousness providing neither complete nor trustworthy knowledge of the neuronal processes, that these are in the first instance to be regarded to their whole extent as unconscious and are to be inferred like other natural things.[14]

Nonetheless, any account of mental phenomenon must attend to this question of conscious awareness, if only as one among the many *functions* of the organism. What makes this question so difficult to answer is the fact that, contrary to Freud's fundamental presupposition that all mental phenomena—indeed all phenomena whatsoever—can be explained by recourse to quantities of force, consciousness does not register quantities of force at all. Rather, it is comprised of a flow of qualitative multiplicity that expresses itself as sensation. Thus, the nervous system must somehow translate or transform quantity into quality.

> Whereas science has set about the task of tracing all the qualities of our sensations back to external quantities, it is to be expected from the structure of our nervous system that it consists of contrivances for transforming external quantity into quality; and here the original trend of keeping off quantity seems to triumph once more.[15]

But how and where does this transformation occur? The question of where this transformation occurs will perhaps offer us some insight into the question of how. It is clear that consciousness neurones, which together form their own system ω, are not identical to perception neurones. The latter, as we have seen, are distinguished by their reception of external *Q*, which are then transmitted by way of the center back to the motor contrivances of the periphery for reflex action. And as we saw above, the quantities with which system φ is assailed by the external world are of a comparatively

[14] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 308
[15] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 309

higher magnitude. This would seem to render the apprehension of qualities within this system impossible, insofar as these magnitudes would overpower consciousness. Thus, the neurones that condition consciousness must involve relatively low *Qn*. As such, they must be buried deep within system ψ, where *Qn* feature much lower magnitudes, and this accords with everything that suggests that consciousness is generated in or near the uppermost part of the nervous system; namely, that of memory.

This creates a problem. If the *Qn* associated with system ω is of such a low order of magnitude, it follows that its contact barriers would remain relatively impermeable like those of the memory neurones. This would seem to conflict with the essentially transitory nature of consciousness and its seemingly spontaneous synthesis of qualities into an ever-changing organic flow. In this regard, consciousness exhibits a resemblance to perception in terms of its mutability. Both are characterized precisely by the changeability of its content from moment to moment. But, for perceptual neurones, this changeability was explained in terms of the way that, because of the high magnitudes with which they have been bombarded, they are rendered incapable of retaining new traces. And this clearly contradicts what has been postulated regarding the relative absence of magnitudes associated with system ω. If not in terms of a high degree of facilitation from *Q*, then how explain this changeability of consciousness?

With some reluctance, Freud suggests that there is perhaps yet another way that the contact barriers can achieve the degree of facilitation necessary for the ceaseless and total *restitutio ad integrum* that is an essential feature of consciousness. He tells us that the contact barriers may be permeated by something other than *Qn*, but this will require a slight revision of the hypothesis concerning the ways in which forces may pass between the cells. Freud writes:

> So far as I have regarded it only as the transference of *Qn* from one neurone to another. But it must have still another characteristic, of a temporal nature; for the mechanics of the physicists have allowed this temporal characteristic to the other motions of masses in the external world as well. I speak of this as period for short. Thus I shall assume that all the resistance of the contact barriers applies only to the transference of *Q*, but that the period of the neuronal motion is transmitted without inhibition in all directions, as though through a process of induction.[16]

[16] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 310

We can understand period to be a measure of the changes in the rhythm and frequency that comes to the organism, through the sensory contrivances, from the external world. What separates ω neurones from ψ neurones is not that the latter have no period, but that their period is monotonous, and thus they do not generate enough difference in cadence or frequency for the emergence of the variations within the qualitative multiplicity. Furthermore, the dominant feature of system ψ is the retainment of traces, while that of system ω is the translation of this rhythm into the sensation of quality. System ψ joins directly to the internal organs, and the pressures exerted there ebb and flow according to somewhat regular rhythms. Whereas the ψ neurones' period is relatively invariant, the ω neurones exhibit broad variances in period. Outer qualities are nothing more than sensations whose differences arise according to an instantaneous, inner translation of these variances in period by the ω neurones. These variances appear as the myriad textures of the external world.

Consciousness, then, is the field within which sensations express themselves, and we have just spoken of the qualitative differences that come from the external world by way of the sense organs. But what about the sensations that we have of ourselves? All sensations, whether of the external world or of ourselves, are the result of a translation by the nervous system of what is essentially quantitative into something quantitative. The universe is fundamentally a movement of forces and, just as the external world is in itself totally devoid of quality, so too is the organism lacking substantially in anything qualitative. This means that, insofar as we have sensations of our own bodies, they too represent qualitative translations of something that is in itself devoid of quality. Because the real is in substance nothing but quantitative magnitudes, consciousness can never deliver anything but unfaithful translations. In its essence, consciousness is the result of a movement of distortion of quantity into quality by system ω.

But again, consciousness is only possible when the quantities in question are (1) of extremely low magnitudes and (2) feature some variation in frequency and rhythm. We said that the period of system ψ is monotonous and regular. This means that, as far as consciousness is concerned, its changes in rhythm are not as instantaneous as those of the external world. Rather than exhibiting its rhythmic differentials instantaneously in the manner of outer sensation, inner sensation gets

louder or softer/slower or faster over a protracted period according to the organism's management of the accumulation of *Qn* in endogenous lines of conduction, and for this reason, it can be compared to ambient, white noise. It is only recognizable when there is variation.

This may offer insight into the dual function of consciousness regarding, on the one side, the attribution of differences to the external world and, on the other, the sensing internal changes within the organism itself. The vividness of our sensations of the external world can be explained by the wealth of variances in rhythms that are to be found there. Because they appear as the very texture of the extended world, these shining differences instantaneously stand in broad contrast with one another. The summer sky at sunset shows depths of flaming reds that stand in stark opposition to the lush, attenuated greens of the foliage—each feature with its own distinct quality. In spite of these differences and contrasts, the entire vista immediately hangs together in synthetic unity within consciousness. In comparison to such sensations of the external world, inner sensation strikes us as dull and indistinct. Think of the rather nagging discomfort that comes with having a mild cold, or the equally vague feeling of contentment that comes from eating and resting well, each representing normal variations of inner sensation. As shades of vague feelings of comfort to discomfort, just like outer sensation, these differences also hang together in synthetic unity, though in this case this unity is not apprehended instantaneously, but extended over a protracted period.

If consciousness is characterized by its mutability and its capacity for *restitutio ad integrum*, how then do we account for this protraction? Though Freud does not venture into this territory, the key to this problem probably lies in its location in the upper stories of the nervous system, where ω neurones exist in close proximity with ψ neurones and *Qn* is extremely small. By way of contrast, perception exists on the other side of the neurological spectrum. As such, insofar as it is not accompanied by consciousness, perception does not feature this protraction. And, from this standpoint, perception itself can be said to have no period or duration. Neither does it exhibit the synthetic unity of consciousness. As a purely mechanical and automatic relation to the externality of the organism, it is timeless and devoid of shades or subtle differences. Consciousness, on the other hand, is a sort of diaphanous ephemera that arises due to changes in the period of the movement of *Q* through ψ. Here matters

become rather opaque, but we might venture that consciousness is itself the interval in which the organism waits for satisfaction of the exigencies of life—that is, consciousness is the apex of the arc toward homeostasis, which of course happens through the satisfaction of biological drives resulting from discharge in ψ.

Let us return to what we identified as the dullness and indistinctness of inner sensation for a moment. Recall that, according to Freud, inner sensation can be understood as a translation of quantitative magnitudes within the organism as qualitative differences within consciousness. That is, inner sensations represent the inner, quantitative states of the organism as quality. We said that, though monotonous and in themselves devoid of quality, the neurones of system ψ also have their period. How does this "psychical period" come to be experienced within consciousness? Freud tells us that it is through their deviations from monotony. And, as we said above, we can think of these deviations as expressing themselves in terms of slight changes in tempo and volume. And though this reference to volume would seem to refer back to quantitative magnitude, as translations sensations never increase or decrease. Consciousness is itself already the product of a translation that has been performed by the ω neurones of miniscule vibrational quantities into qualities. The increases in the tempo and volume of psychical period are marked by their own qualitative shades of sensation, which is identified as pleasurable or unpleasurable according to the organism's natural inclination for homeostasis.

We can see how, through frequencies that reach them by way of the sensory organs, ω neurones would be in a position to translate the ensemble of vibrant textures of the external world into sensation but, insofar as it has no sensory contrivances that open onto the internal organs, how does it accomplish the same vis-à-vis the internal workings of the organism itself? We said that the rhythms of the external world stand in instantaneous variance, and these are immediately translated by ω neurones into quality. Contrarily, the rhythms of the organism itself are largely monotonous, and they gradually increase in rhythm and frequency according to the pressures that are exerted through the accumulation of *Qn* in endogenous lines of conduction leading to the sympathetic ganglion, exerting their pressures on that system that most closely neighbors that of consciousness; namely the system of memory neurones. In order to understand how system ω picks up on the psychical period, let us propose an analogy. Isn't the relationship between consciousness and

system ψ similar to that of having raucous neighbors who, because they live on the other side of a posterior wall, we have never seen? These neighbors are rather quiet during the day, and cause us little disturbance. We can study, attend to the day's business, care for our family—all in relative peace. In the evening, as the depths of night approach, relentless rhythms can be heard emanating from behind the wall, at first quietly, then increasingly more loudly, but always dully and indistinctly due to the attenuating effect of the wall. Because we do not know these neighbors and have never participated in their parties, we can only interpret what is going on there. Images of revelries come to mind; undulating bodies and orgiastic dancing. Or if, because of a sheltered upbringing, we have never been exposed to such images, these sounds will descend upon our ears as distraction upon the mind. Likewise, consciousness registers variances in the psychical period of unconscious memories as if through a posterior wall—never directly, and only as a vague uneasiness or displeasure that disrupts the preferred shades of sensation within consciousness. What resides on the other side of this wall is nothing less than a part of myself that is more essential to what I am than anything I've ever known, or ever could know, within consciousness.

Our analogy is imperfect in this regard: it would have us believe not only that consciousness is characterized mainly by its isolation within the upper stories of the nervous system, but also that, because it endures both what comes to it through this 'posterior wall' and through the sensory organs, it is merely passive, possessing no agency or active dimension. On the contrary, just like memory neurones, those of system ω are indeed charged with a minimal quantity of *Qn*, which indicates that they too are in need of discharge. And since discharge always unfolds in the direction of motility, consciousness represents yet another active player in the battle over the body. If human beings are capable of acting freely, this apparently marks the locus of that freedom. Nonetheless, it would seem that such a freedom could merely concern itself with its qualitative situation--this, inasmuch as consciousness is a field that is consigned exclusively to the expression of qualities. And because the natural tendency toward homeostasis that characterizes the organism as a whole also manifests itself through consciousness, the latter will always bend toward the somewhat kitschy superficialities of domestication—that is, with situating itself in a pleasing environment in which to dwell. As such, it is likely that any *Qn* discharged

by system ω in the direction of motility will do so in the interest of domestic satisfaction of some order.

Given what we now understand regarding system ω, we can makes some claims about the conditions that must be in place in order for it to function properly. Not only is the success of the mechanical function of keeping off external *Q* a primary condition for the proper functioning of system ω, but the *Qn* coming from endogenous stimuli into the memory neurones must also be kept at bay. Any influx of powerful *Q* coming from the external world that penetrates into deeply into ψ, thus sending its reverberations into ω, can only but disrupt consciousness, either by engendering displeasure or by undermining it completely. Likewise, on the other side, when *Qn* behind the 'posterior wall' accumulate too much, they neutralize what little power system ω has, thus temporarily nullifying the delicate adornments of quality and negating its ability to maintain its fragile equilibrium by thwarting its access to the motor contrivances. In this case, the increased pressures exerted upon memory neurones from the accumulation of *Qn* in endogenous lines of conduction avail themselves of direct routes to release, unmediated by qualitative concerns.

Consciousness is a passion in this movement toward biological release, initially registering the displeasure of broad variations in period then later the pleasure of a return to a normalization of period. Or, because consciousness is subject to extreme deviations in period, its conditions are momentarily undermined altogether and quality is neutralized. Consider the following example: Under normal circumstances, our hunger ebbs and flows somewhat gently. Because of the gradual variation in psychic period that corresponds with these changes, we remain attuned to the intricacies of our sense of flavor, and our choices are made with subtle qualitative discrimination. However, when because of deprivation we are seized with a ravenous hunger, our sensitivity to the taste of our food diminishes dramatically. In rare cases such as those of starvation, the qualitative discrimination of consciousness is neutralized altogether or, if it endures at all, consciousness becomes a pure passion. Rodent meat, shoe leather, even human flesh—all of these become possible sources of sustenance.

What have we just described if not an effective and immediate reduction in the complexity of the organism vis-à-vis its environment? In our example, this is most apparent in the diminished capacity of consciousness for qualitative discrimination,

but this represents only the first, inwardly evident stage in such a movement of reduced complexity. If the body does not receive the sustenance necessary for the maintenance of normal cell processes, the latter begin the entropic process of breaking down.

7. Conclusion: The Ego

Let us now turn more directly to the ego itself. Indeed, we have already been engaged with this discussion of the ego, insofar as this 'negotiation' between the functions is the ego's most fundamental role. This discussion provides us with an opportunity to bring our examination of *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* to a close. If the following comments seem insufficient to us, then it must be remembered that Freud abandoned *The Project* before its completion—even, indeed, entirely aborting the effort to explain mental phenomenon on a purely psychophysical basis. While elements of the early scientific psychophysicalism remain in his later work, they are supplemented with the dynamic, economic, topographical and structural accounts which, using metaphorical descriptions, sought to augment the deficiencies that are evident in the effort to base psychology on purely physiological terrain. And for those of us who are familiar with the work of the later Freud, these concluding remarks will no doubt leave us wanting for a more thoroughgoing explanation of the implications of these concepts for therapeutic technique.

The scholar of Freud may be tempted to avail himself of the conceptual richness of the later work to clarify the obscurities evident in *The Project*. We shall resist this impulse, and simply bring our discussion to a close with these few comments about the ego, which represents the point of integration of the ensemble of mechanisms of the psychic apparatus hitherto examined.

The ego represents the avatar of the larger unity that is the nervous system as a whole, both exhibiting its dominant trends and mediating between its functions. Nonetheless, as "an organization that has been formed in ψ whose presence interferes with passages of quantity which on the first occasion occurred in a particular way [i.e accompanied by satisfaction or pain]," it also represents a distinct development within this system.[17] What is this first occasion of the passage of quantity? Freud no doubt

[17] *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 323

means to refer us to the most original moments in life—the very first enjoyment, the very first trauma of the infant child (or even the fetus). In these initial moments, satisfaction and pain happen straightforwardly, without complication, hindrance or inhibition. Insofar as the infant is protected by his parents from external aggressions, his body remains oriented exclusively toward satisfaction of the instincts, and in this way the infant embodies pure, unadulterated will. *Qn* flow without interruption in the direction of satisfaction, as the river toward the sea. But eventually the child is assailed with pressures that beset it from the outside, and this is a normal and necessary moment of development. Inasmuch as the mother cannot protect him from these pressures forever, he must be gradually prepared to react with his own devices to the external world. While these initial pressures often come from the father who imposes his own regime and demands that the child make advances toward bearing his own weight, they take myriad forms. Wherever these pressures issue from, this interruption of the primary narcissistic unidirectionality of *Qn* toward immediate and uninhibited release gives rise to the first complications in ψ.

Involving a partial suspension of the movement of release, these complications result in an accumulation of *Qn* that, because it has been inhibited in its flow, has been rendered partially quiescent by the mental apparatus (cathexis), and this *Qn* can later be deployed in view of satisfaction or defense of the structures of the ego. What was firstly an external inhibitor of satisfaction (such as, for instance, the father's interference in the relation between the boy and his mother) is straightaway internalized as complexification within ψ. Now the organism begins to evince not only a shield in the direction of external *Q*, but also a kind of internal detention mechanism that suspends release in the direction of satisfaction, resulting in increasing summation of internal *Qn*.

At the level of consciousness, this internalization manifests as the vague anticipation of an unpleasant encounter if the movement of satisfaction is allowed to proceed (such as, for instance, the strong rebuke from the father), and secondly, in accordance with the mechanism of summation, as a feeling of displeasure that corresponds to the postponement of satisfaction. In the future, the release of pressures should not occur under circumstances that have proven to be even more disagreeable to the organism than the postponement of satisfaction. Thus, it would not be incorrect to say that this uneasy anticipation, or anxiety, is one of the outward

features of the developed ego. It is in this way that the organism can begin to become more preoccupied with avoiding displeasure than with finding occasions for satisfaction, and this can ultimately take the form of a paralyzing anxiety that further frustrates the release of pressures. But this pathological form of anxiety arises only through the exaggeration of a normal tendency for watchful vigilance and readiness to react. And it is rather likely that this exaggerated form of anxiety follows from a measure of unpredictability in how the specific regime of order has been enforced. If the sovereign is intemperate and immoderate in his impositions of order, life under his gaze will seem exceedingly erratic and dangerous.

From the standpoint of the quantity of force that is applied under normal conditions, the punitive measures of the father are moderate relative to those of the instantaneous traumatic impact that generates extreme pain. Furthermore, they exhibit a certain consistency and regularity in their deployment. Facilitation is achieved through external repetition—that is, through conditioning, and there is no primary or original event of painful impact. As such, in accordance with Freud's theory that quantity expresses itself as complication in system ψ, as long as they are applied, these measures precipitate a prolonged building up of complication, and it is just this complication that is the essence of the ego.

However, we also found that this breaking up of quantities along a multiplicity of lines is only possible only when these quantities are not too powerful. If the violent impact exceeds the nervous system's capacity for complication, it will cause a "stroke of lightning" that penetrates deeply into ψ, leaving in its wake facilitations that are probably of the same order as those of system φ. Recall that, as a moment in the mechanical function of the organism, the facilitations of the latter system are not capable of the retainment of quantities (cathexis), but rather function simply to immediately keep off external *Q*. Likewise, facilitations of this order that are located in system ψ will exhibit this feature, only now they have emerged in a system that is supposed to be protected from extreme external forces. Because these facilitations function in the same way as those of system φ, that they are located deep within ψ where cathexis is high means that they will function as a point of leakage within the ego. System φ never waits, and facilitations of the same kind as those of this system do not wait either, if only because they are incapable of it—their facilitations are total, and they retain no quotient of *Q*. System ψ, on the other hand, is the seat of

consciousness, and we ventured earlier that consciousness is the interval in which the organism waits for satisfaction of the exigencies of life. As such, we have every reason to believe that a total facilitation within this system, if it isn't sidestepped, will function to interrupt this arc toward of satisfaction, thereby triggering a defensive reaction in moments when, under normal conditions, the organism would simply endure a delay in the partial release of its cathexis. Thus, in terms of the impact upon consciousness, when internal *Qn* flow into these leaks, duration contracts, and even stops altogether.

By now it should be clear that the defensive repetitions of the ego can arise either as a result of deliberate conditioning of moderate intensity by an external power or as an internal reaction to a single painful trauma. In other words, these structures of the ego can be cultivated progressively as a reaction to external conditions through the deliberate and repetitious retracing of facilitations (habit), or they can arise over a protracted period as internal reverberations of a single event that, due to its painful impact, continues to exert a powerful influence over the mental apparatus (trauma). What was initially a simple but profound laceration within ψ—the result of an impact upon the nervous system that was too powerful to be 'complicated' along a multiplicity of lines—becomes a painful scar in the nervous tissue that must be circumvented in the effort to achieve satisfaction. If this movement of circumvention is not successful, if vital *Qn* run up against this *Q* drain within ψ, it can only but short circuit the normal course of release and throw the organism into paroxysm. Because it consists chiefly of facilitations of the order of habit, the ego is always already wired in such a way that it inevitably runs up against these heavy facilitations. In other words, it must break the intransigent patterns of habit in order to avoid the depletion of its cathexis. The direct pathways of release through ψ in the direction of the somatic element and the external world now appear to be fraught with uncharted, hidden hazards, in addition to the overt ones that have already been mapped out within system ψ (i.e. those deliberately enforced by the father). But routes of circumvention must nevertheless be learned and, unlike the lessons imparted by the father and by society through conditioning, this is a lesson that ψ must teach itself.

3

The Libido, Trauma, and the Hidden Forces of the Death Drive in Freud's Metapsychology

During the First World War, Sigmund Freud saw a surge of interest in his version of depth psychology among representatives from the highest ranks of the Central European Powers. What occasioned this interest was the eruption of neurotic disorders that were to be found among those returning from the front.[1] Unsurprisingly, the violence of this war generated a powerful reaction among many of those who fought on its front lines. This reaction was produced in no small measure by the deployment of sophisticated weapons that were capable of killing on a scale never before seen by man. What was a tragedy for Europe represented an opportunity for the School of Psychoanalysis. Freud and his community of researchers had already been occupying themselves with the effort to understand the way that certain powerful experiences in the course of human development exerted a determinatively negative influence over the mental apparatus and inhibited its normal functioning. Because the habit of psychoanalytical science was to "consider first the extreme and unmistakably pathological form," it was uniquely fitted to the task of offering an answer to the proliferation of extreme neurotic disturbances resulting from the war (Vol. 19, *Economic Problem of Masochism*, 282). Now, because these unmistakably pathological forms were so prevalent that one could scarcely walk the streets of Europe

[1] All references to Freud can to be found in the volumes of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Pscychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Henceforth, only the volume, the title of the volume, the particular work and the page number will be referenced: Vol. 17, "War Neuroses," p. 207

without encountering individuals upon whom the marks of distress from their time at the front could be clearly seen, there was no denying the need for an answer to these psychological pathologies. Such a proliferation of this pathological form represented a threat not only to the continued war effort, but even, it could be argued, to the general stability of European society. Psychoanalysis thus proposed an answer to the question of how to manage this threat, and found in the war an opportunity to further prove the validity of its claims.

Freud's concern with the impact of war on man was to be the specifically clinical problem of battle's destructive effects upon the balance of the individual psyche and, more generally, with the way in which these disturbances represent *limit cases* that bring into sharper relief the essential features of the mental apparatus. For Freud the limit case that interests him most is the unmistakably *pathological* form. Leaving the positive question of health entirely unasked, Freud prefers instead to focus on the most obvious *deviations from health*. These deviations pertain as much to extreme "deficiencies in function" as to the patient's own declarations that he is suffering.[2] This is particularly clear in the case of the war neuroses. Primary among the reasons for the state's interest in psychoanalysis during the war was the latter's capacity for suggesting techniques which would preserve and restore readiness for battle.

As the Great War came to end, the state's interest in the establishment of centers for the treatment and examination of the features of shell shock give way to other concerns. Given the persistence of PTSD among those returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we can be forgiven for believing that these neurotic disturbances that followed from the exposure to the violence of battle did not continue to assert themselves even in peacetime. And yet Freud makes the striking observation that, as aggressions were brought to a close, the largest number of these neurotic disturbances vanished along with them.[3] The fact that this disorder can disappear when peaceful conditions resume testifies to the subtle and intimate relation between an instance of disorder—related as it is to a specific type of suffering for the individual—and the pressing demands of functionality and propriety made upon the individual by society. However much it may appear that the deviation from health pertains first of all to the suffering of the individual, in the final account it would seem that these deviations

[2] Vol. 12, *A Note on the Unconscious*, p. 263
[3] Vol. 17, *War Neurosis*, p. 207

cannot be understood without reference to an inability or an unwillingness—whether conscious or unconscious—to carry the burdens which society or one of its representatives has imposed.

There are several reasons why we have elected to begin our discussion with the subject of war neurosis; the most notable among them is the fact this disorder provides us with the opportunity to examine the role that libidinal forces play in *every* neurosis. At first sight, it may seem that the causes of war neuroses can be understood on grounds that have nothing to do with infantile sexuality. However, we will see that, like all other forms of neuroses, even war neurosis is also traceable to what Freud has called "a weak point in the structure of the sexual function."[4] This weak point is the result of the failure of the original effort to securely bind and render quiescent the forces that emanate from the libido in the child's movement beyond infantile sexuality, which is the essential moment in the development toward a mature relationship with reality. In other words, the subject has failed to fully relinquish his attachment to some pleasure of infantile sexuality, and he revolts against the forces of reality that separate him from this pleasure.

The process of binding involves a repetition of the trauma of separation from the object of libidinal cathexis. Later in life, this repetition always manifests itself in relation to some representative of the object that for the unconscious represents the original object which deprived the subject of his pleasure. As long as the repetition of the trauma of separation continues, the pleasure principle—which is responsible for efficiently evacuating the psychic apparatus of its tensions in such a way that these tensions do not disturb the tranquility of consciousness—loses its dominion over the psychic apparatus. A moment from the past continues to haunt the subject. This moment is one in which some form of pleasure to which the young subject demonstrated a deep attachment was, under the compulsions of reality, forcibly given up. In this way, the subject becomes anchored in the past, which both inhibits it from giving itself to new opportunities for pleasure within the present and also disturbs its efforts to competently manage the hostile forces of reality.

Like all neurotic conditions, the war neurosis can reveal itself to be resistant to therapeutic technique, which aims at restoring the dominion of the pleasure principle and reconciling the patient to the present. Though psychoanalysis saw some success in

[4] Vol. 11, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 46

its efforts to manage the pathologies of neuroses, it also saw its share of failures. After an examination of libido theory's explanation for neurosis, we will turn to the question of why it is that some subjects are incapable of giving up their symptoms. Freud's answer to this question is that there are drives other than those of the libidinal instincts; namely, the death drives.

1. The Pleasure Principle and its Disruptions

The pathological cases that psychoanalytical practice has been proven most effective in treating are the neurotic disorders. These disorders, in Freud's view, offer an indirect or substitutive gratification of instinctual sexual or 'libidinal' impulses that have been repressed. The intensity of a neurotic symptom stems from the energy of a mental process which has been held back from consciousness and is thus prevented from being acted upon directly. Because this mental process has been disallowed from realizing its direct aim, which would involve passing from the unconscious through consciousness on the way to action, the energies that animate it invent for themselves a circuitous path to release. The unpleasurable innervations of the symptom amount to the roundabout release of those quantities of psychic energy of the repressed mental process.

Regardless of whether the source of excitation for consciousness issues from the external world or from the unconscious libido, only physical forces in flow can trigger the sensations of pleasure or unpleasure for the organism. While the organism possesses from birth a kind of protective barrier against mild exogenous forces in the form of the epidermis, it is endowed with no such barrier for the protection from the movement of endogenous forces. Thus the organism endeavors to construct for itself a kind of internal barrier or dam against these forces by which it renders them 'quiescent' or 'bound', effectively *containing* them in the form of cathexis. Once libidinal forces have been rendered sufficiently quiescent, it is only when their accumulation exceeds a certain quantitative threshold that they overflow their bindings and generate affective disturbances that make their demands heard within consciousness as unpleasurable sensations.

Freud designates the urgency for the release of psychic energies with the term *pleasure principle.* This principle is responsible for the *regulation* of the movement of

release of libidinal issuing from the unconscious. "We believe that the course of [mental] events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it take a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension—that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure and a production of pleasure."[5] But because external reality also makes demands upon the subject, this lowering of internal tensions must often be postponed or delayed until there is an appropriate time and opportunity for discharge. Thus, the pleasure principle must have a counterpart which, rather than aiming at immediate gratification, temporarily suspends the movement of discharge. The pleasure principle is allowed to gain dominion over the mental apparatus only to the degree that the principle that is responsible for the regulation of protective reflexes that are oriented outwards toward the external world has relaxed its hold on the organism. This counterpart Freud designates as the 'reality principle', which vigilantly protects the somatic element from external aggressions, and is thus responsible for the task of self-preservation.

Both of these principles are thus concerned with the regulation of the movement of physical forces. Whereas the pleasure principle regulates the discharge of endogenous forces emanating from deep within the organism, the reality principle regulates the functions that deflect the physical forces proceeding from the external world. As such, each may be understood as an expression of an essential necessity of life; namely, to keep the quantities of force to which the living organism is subject as low as possible, irrespective of whether they originate from the inside or from the outside.

Neurotic symptoms are the mark of *a breach in the pleasure principle*. Whereas the reality principle merely regulates the *temporary suspension* of the pleasure of discharge which is itself overseen by the pleasure principle, the symptom marks *a deeper disruption* of the normal movement of discharge. A breach of the pleasure principle thus involves a moment in which the libido has been 'cut off' from its normal path of release.

Initially this obstruction always corresponds with an inhibition imposed from without by the external forces of reality, whether by the blind forces within the environment or the presence of an external agent that actively surveils the behavior of the subject, such as the paternal figure. Insofar as the libido is able to freely resume its normal course of discharge when the external inhibiting power withdraws, no neurotic

[5] Vol. 18, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, p. 7

symptom will emerge. In this case, the ego, whose function it is to mediate the flow of forces between unconscious and consciousness, simply adapts itself to the new conditions and awaits an appropriate moment for release.

However, as the ego *internalizes* the opposition of the forces of reality in a more radical way, now holding itself to the standards which were formerly enforced by the external censor, it can itself become an obstacle to discharge. The ego is of course immanent to the mental apparatus and, as such, it is capable of a degree of surveillance over the unconscious' efforts to find a path of discharge which greatly exceeds that of any external censor. With the neuroses, an agency within the ego itself inhibits the normal movement of release indefinitely, preventing the impulse that originates in the unconscious from entering into consciousness or from fulfilling its aim being directly acted out. What began as an external form of censorship has now become an extreme form of psychic *repression*. And yet, in spite of this repressive activity, the unconscious persists in its effort to release its forces in accordance with the requirements of the pleasure principle.

The disruptions of neurosis thus follow from an economic imbalance in the psychic complex whereby what by all rights should have been an opportunity for pleasure is transformed into an occasion of displeasure.[6] In hysteria for instance, instead of being *acted* out, the impulse is merely *felt* as an innervation the source and true nature of which is unconscious and thus incomprehensible for the subject. Like all neurotic symptoms, the affections of conversion hysteria follow from a disjunction between reality and the libidinal energies of the unconscious. And as the disjunction between libido and reality is internalized and radicalized, the former is accorded no opportunities to discharge its cathexis, and so it invents for itself a new avenue of release without the cooperation of the ego:

> Neurotic symptoms are the outcome of a conflict which arises over a new method of satisfying the libido. The two forces which have fallen out meet once again in the symptom and are reconciled, as it were, by the compromise of the symptom that has been constructed. It is for that reason, too, that the symptom is so resistant: it is supported from both sides. We also know that one of the partners in the conflict is the unsatisfied libido which has been repulsed by reality and must now seek for other paths to its satisfaction.[7]

[6] Vol. 18, *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*, p. 11
[7] Vol. 16, *Paths to the Formation of Symptoms*, 358

The neurotic symptom thus represents a new 'compromise' between the unconscious libido and reality according to which the pleasure principle maintains its sway over the mental apparatus. This compromise has nevertheless been won at a high price. While it is true that the organism still manages to expend the repressed libidinal energies through the symptom, it does so at precisely the price of the conscious *pleasure* which would naturally accompany this release if it were permitted to follow its normal path.

There is more. As reality, together with the agency within the ego that acts on its behalf, thwarts the release of libidinal energies, the libido responds by cathecting earlier, now-repressed positions from earlier moments of development. Just as the child once found moments in the course of his development to withdraw from the external censoring agent in order to find satisfaction (such as the child who sucks his thumb when he is sure that his father is not watching), so also does the libido of the neurotic adult withdraw from the internal censoring agency *within* the ego toward its earlier positions. In this case, the libido may regressively reinvest these positions with the energy which now, because of the repressive effort of the ego, can find no immediate path of egress. These positions are what Freud calls 'fixations.' The fixation consists of a complex of habitual repetitions that at an earlier moment along the path of development could be counted on to yield some measure of pleasure. These are repetitions that originally unfolded under the sway of the pleasure principle, the source of which can be found in the "activities and experiences of infantile sexuality, in the abandoned component trends, in the objects of childhood which have been given up."[8] Moreover, these experiences have continued to form the basis of dream formations of the order of wish fulfillments, to which the libido, insofar as it has been disappointed in its efforts to find satisfaction in reality, now reverts more fully.

In adult life, this infantile fixation continues to represent a "weak point in the structure of the sexual function" around which the repressed libidinal energy gathers.[9] Even if the child outwardly *displayed* no excessive or pathological aversion at the moment of development when it was compelled by external forces to pass beyond the particular stage of libidinal organization, on the basis of the reemergence of the fixation in adult life it can be surmised that the young subject must have nevertheless inwardly *felt* the sacrifice of these pleasures on the altar of development to be an immense

[8] Vol. 16. *Paths to the Formation of Symptoms*, 361
[9] Vol. 11. *Five Essays on Psychoanalysis*, 46

affective disturbance. The normal course of development requires that many of these pleasures be given up. If the pleasure principle is to operate normally, because it obeys strict physical laws and pertains to definite quantities of libidinal energy, at the moment that some pleasures are given up others must be strengthened. This follows from the way in which the forces that formerly found release in the relinquished instinctual trends of infantile sexuality are canalized into the new, 'normal' organizations of adult sexuality. But because the libido has instead *receded* to its earlier position, some critical agency within the ego raises objections to this regressive movement, engendering a new conflict within the psychic apparatus. The symptom thus reflects a frustrated effort to secure a path *back* to the erotic pleasures that were available to the subject earlier in life, and the neuroses can be broadly defined as a rejection of the new organizational complexes that have been imposed on the subject on behalf of the earlier ones of childhood.

When it operates correctly in accordance with the proper deployment of the pleasure principle, the ego maintains consciousness merely as an open site of *passage* and disallows it from being flooded with sensations arising erratically from the unconscious. The pleasure principle thus unfolds according to a selection within the ego of certain acceptable forms of release. Though it waits for this release according to the reality principle, it nevertheless succeeds in evacuating the pressures to which the mental apparatus is subjected. As the secondary processes of the ego begin to mediate the primary processes operative in the unconscious, the ego determines which forms of release are appropriate and which are not. The so-called 'secondary processes' actually begin as a form of censorship from without, and are slowly internalized within the mental apparatus. This selection originally unfolds in view of memories in which forces have been released either at inappropriate *times* or in a *manner* that is itself considered to be inappropriate.

2. The Sexual Origins of Neuroses and the Lost Purity of the Subject

Before moving on to consider neurotic cases that are particularly resistant to treatment, let us briefly summarize the libido theory's account of neuroses: Freud holds that neurotic disturbances follow chiefly from an inability or an unwillingness of the unconscious to give up the purity of the erotic pleasures of childhood in the face of the

forces of reality. And yet, the libido is so insistent upon these pleasures that it revolts against the censorship of the ego by both inventing new paths of release in the form of the symptom and upsetting the tranquility of consciousness. And because it is reality and its proxy within the ego which has thwarted his satisfaction, the subject may find in almost every encounter with the world a pretext for his own suffering, and through a process of projection he may come to blame others for a displeasure that really emerges from his own depths.[10] Something within him has revolted against the world, and as long as this revolt continues he can find no peace.

Influential contemporaries such as Alfred Adler, himself a member of the Vienna Circle until 1911, raised powerful objections to the specifically sexual origins of the neuroses. For those who are uninitiated to the subtleties of psychoanalytical theory, it is indeed difficult to understand how certain neuroses such as that of war might be traceable to problems in the evolution of infantile sexuality. In lectures delivered in the United States in 1910, Freud attempted to put these doubts to rest. It is true, he concedes, that in some cases psychoanalytic investigation traces the symptoms back to traumas other than ones involving sexuality. However, he claims,

> this distinction loses its significance owing to other circumstances. For the work of analysis required for the thorough explanation and complete recovery of a case never comes to a stop at events that occurred at the time of the onset of the illness, but invariably goes back to the patients puberty and early childhood; and it is only there that it comes upon the impressions and events which determined the later onset of the illness. It is only experiences in childhood that explain susceptibility to later traumas and it is only *by uncovering these almost invariably forgotten memory-traces and by making them conscious that we acquire the power to get rid of the symptoms*....The repressed wishful impulses of childhood have alone provided the power for the construction of symptoms.[11]

In our own discussions thus far, we have found the neurotic symptom to be a sign of *an insurgency of forces within the unconscious against an order that has been imposed upon the subject from without—an order that stands in opposition to its most primordial desires*. In this quote, Freud is exceedingly clear about his belief that this revolt, if it is

[10] "A particular way is adopted of dealing with any internal excitations which produce too great an increase of unpleasure: there is a tendency to treat them as though they were acting, not from the inside, but from the outside...This is the origin of *projection*, which is destined to play such a large part in the causation of pathological processes." Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 29

[11] Vol. 11, *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*: Fourth Lecture 1910, 41

to be traced back far enough, always unfolds on behalf of the pleasures of childhood sexuality, broadly understood.[12] And in what behaviors do we find the essence of this pleasure, if not those of being loved, stroked, fed, watered and put to sleep? What is desired above all is every solace that that the mother offered to the child. Moreover, the subject seeks to be maintained in a *passive* position within which his satisfactions are provided for him by another.

With this in mind, we are better equipped to understand the relationship between the war neuroses and infantile sexuality. Freud concedes that the link in indeed more remote than in the neuroses of peacetime, which psychoanalytical technique has successfully demonstrated to derive from a conflict between the ego and the sexual instincts which it represses. Whatever their differences, there is little doubt that the neuroses of war issue from a conflict in the ego no less than those of peacetime. Now, however, "the conflict arises between the soldier's old, peacetime ego and his new warlike one, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego realizes what danger it runs of losing its life owing to the rashness of its newly formed, parasitic double."[13] Presuming that the peacetime ego was somewhat well-adjusted to the conditions within which it found itself, it must have found substitutive satisfactions for those given up in childhood. Though the subject was regularly compelled by this relatively peaceful reality to wait for the discharge of his libidinal forces, it nevertheless found opportunities for pleasure.

By contrast, war drives the subject even further from these pleasures. Under conditions of war, the opportunities for discharge prove to be even rarer, and the subject must consequently delay his satisfaction even longer, if he finds it at all. And because under the conditions of war the subject's ego is not only assailed by forces emanating from the libido but it is also exposed to intense dangers from the external world which are perceived directly through consciousness, these conditions reveal themselves to be even more unreceptive to the demands of his libido. Where under such conditions can one find satisfaction? When can one relax? There seems to be nowhere to hide, nowhere to find a moment of repose. Moreover, war conditions announce the immanent risk of death, and for the ego—insofar as it acts on behalf of

[12] "Sexuality in this context is to be understood in the extended sense in which it is used in psychoanalysis and is not to be confused with the narrower concept of 'genitality'." (Vol. 17, *War Neuroses*, 208)
[13] Vol. 17. *War Neuroses*, 209

the libidinal instincts in an effort to negotiate a kind of compromise between the forces of reality and those of sexuality—these conditions suggest the risk that one may even lose the opportunity for the pleasures of satisfaction forever.

The picture that we have drawn of the neurotic subject is that of one who above all *desires the recovery of the lost purity of childhood sexuality*. "Neurotics are anchored somewhere in their past; we know now that it is a period of their past in which their libido did not lack satisfaction, in which they were happy."[14] We may even ask whether this purity of childhood sexuality that functions to anchor the neurotic in the past doesn't also provide an image of *the original purity of the subject itself*—a purity that has irreversibly corrupted by the necessity of its dealings with reality.

3. Trauma and the Arduous Path to Overcoming It

The conditions of melancholia and war neuroses that persist long after the cessation of military operations evince an *enduring* disturbance in the pleasure principle's regulatory role over the mental apparatus according to the power that this traumatic memory exerts. In these conditions, some distressing memory of the past stubbornly exerts a negative influence over the mental apparatus—this, in spite of the fact that the subject appears to have every opportunity to move on from the painful experience. And these conditions are not the only ones that reveal this fixation to the past. All neurotic conditions can persist even after the disappearance of the conditions that have generated them. Something within compels the subject to endlessly relive a past moment of loss within the present.

In order to understand these disturbances, we must possess a more precise understanding of the nature of *trauma*. We will find that—whether we speak of the trauma of war or that of the loss of infantile sexuality—all forms of trauma exhibit a fundamental likeness. However, it is not only necessary to closely examine the nature of trauma itself but, in order to understand why this disturbance is so unremitting, an examination the path by which the trauma might be overcome is also indispensable. It will be seen that, if the path of healing is not followed to its end, then the trauma will continue to disturb the ego indefinitely. Navigating the path to health is not such an easy matter. This is an uphill, laborious path, and along the way the subject may

[14] Vol. 16, *Formation of Symptoms*, 365

encounter formidable powers of resistance that sabotage it from the shadows. That is, there may be invisible destructive forces awaiting the subject on this path that prevent it from reaching its destination, actively obstructing the effort to become healthy.

Though it may be difficult for us to imagine that the mere separation of the young child from his mother could be just as traumatic in nature as the horrors of war, psychoanalysis reveals that this difference is in a certain sense negligible. However, we must be careful not to overlook the difference with regard the *source* of the traumatic excitation. Whereas the child must deal with the flood of sensations coming from *within,* issuing from the libido itself, the soldier's excitations assail him from *without,* issuing instead from the violence of battle. This might be enough to establish a difference in kind between them if it were not for the following detail: in both cases, regardless of the source of excitation, the subject has found himself *helpless* in the face of overpowering forces. In each instance, the event which has occasioned the influx of excitations is one for which the subject has no answer.

But there is perhaps yet another reason for establishing that there is no difference in kind between war trauma and that of the loss of infantile pleasure. It may be that the external excitations to which the soldier is subjected in the violence of battle represent only the *condition* for the reemergence of an original trauma. The eruption of excitations originating from within the libido is merely *occasioned* by the violence of battle and really amounts to a repetition of the trauma of the child's original separation from the pleasurable situation vis-à-vis his mother. This explanation tallies well with the idea that the eruption of trauma can always be referred to a weak point in the structure of the sexual function.

Earlier in life, as the child was compelled to give up his immediately pleasurable relation with the mother, there also arose a powerful resistance to relinquishing these pleasures. The weak point, then, has arisen due to the insufficiency of the adaptive mechanisms that have been charged with dealing with the forces of reality that run contrary to desire. It is likely that these first adaptive mechanisms of childhood represent the *foundation* upon which all of the subsequently developed mechanisms will rest. If these mechanisms are not sufficiently rooted in the psychic apparatus from the start—that is, if the child remains somehow deeply resistant to reconciling himself to reality—then the subject will remain vulnerable later in life to their collapse.

By contrast, for the one in whom these defensive measures are more firmly established the susceptibility to psychic trauma later in life diminishes. Presumably, this is someone for whom the opposition between the early pleasures of life and those of later life is not so powerful. For such a person, the transition from the immediate pleasures of infantile life to more advanced stages of development in which these infantile pleasures have been given up has, for whatever reason, proven to be less taxing for the ego. It could be that this relates to the success of the mental apparatus of an effort to transfer larger quantities of libidinal cathexis over to this later iteration of ego, so that the subject learns to love himself and his new situation no less than his old. The one who manages to convey a greater quantity of his libidinal energy over to these defensive composites that form the nucleus of the ego, who has to some extent learned to love even his dealings with reality, will probably exhibit stronger defenses in the face of powerful forces.

But for the one in whom this process has not been so successful, the balance between his original infantilism and the forces of reality is more tenuous. As long as the realities of peacetime society have accommodated in some measure the insistence of this infantilism, the subject has managed only to accept the new arrangement begrudgingly. The instinctual forces of the libido are under peacetime conditions allowed to flow more freely according to configurations which resemble in many ways the original infantile sexuality. We have all seen such examples: the grown man who has found in his wife one who will fulfill the role of his mommy, and who only manages to muster the strength to go forth into the world in order to secure the means to perpetuate this vaguely infantile relationship with the mother-surrogate.

However, with the outbreak of war the accommodation of infantilism can scarcely be allowed, and the subject's defensive measures—regulated as they are under the reality principle—are called upon to work at their highest capacity. This means that instinctual libidinal forces and the drive for pleasure must be kept in check to a much greater degree than ever before. Thus, enduring the new conditions of war requires that these instinctual forces must be even more *securely* 'bound' and rendered 'quiescent'. It is only on the basis of these bindings of instinctual forces that the subject would find himself capable of dealing with the demands of battle under the regulation of the reality principle.

> A failure to effect this binding would provoke a disturbance analogous to a traumatic neurosis; and only after the binding has been

> accomplished would it be possible for the dominance of the pleasure principle (and its modification, the reality principle) to proceed unhindered. Till then the other task of the mental apparatus, the task of mastering or binding excitations, would have precedence—not, indeed, in opposition to the pleasure principle, but independently of it and to some extent in disregard of it.[15]

If the anticathexis whose task it is to suppress the release of libidinal energies at appropriate times is not sufficiently secure or exhibits any 'weak points', then the external violence will occasion the flow of these forces into consciousness at the most inopportune of times; namely, at the first moment in which these defensive measures are really tested under the duress of battle. The ego, sensing the danger that it is in, can only but react powerfully against this influx of libidinal energies. In just the moment at which it senses that it should be concerned with the *external* forces to which it is subject in battle, it finds itself flooded with excitations issuing from *its own depths* that inhibit it from defending itself against external aggressions. Now, the mental apparatus discovers that it has more work to do upon itself before it will be capable of dealing with the aggressions of battle. The mental apparatus must *return* to this unfinished binding activity in order to reestablish the dominion of the pleasure principle over mental life.

4. Reactions to the Traumatic Loss of Pleasure

Bearing our more precise definition of trauma in mind, we may now turn to the question of why it is that this trauma continues to plague the subject. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the persistent war neuroses provides Freud the occasion for a reflection on the question of both the range and the primacy of the pleasure principle over mental life. To this end, he examines other instances than those of the traumatic dreams of war neurotics in which the pleasure principle is apparently put out of play. His hope is that this will not only yield a further conceptual framework for understanding the war neuroses, but more profoundly that it will bring instincts other than those of the libido into the light, instincts which have until this point remained unexamined by psychoanalytical science. It may be that these instincts also exert their force on the libido, which would imply that a revision of libido theory would also be in order.

[15] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 35

Among the instances in which the pleasure principle loses sway over the psychic apparatus are the moments through which every child must pass in the *normal course of development*. These are moments in which the subject has yet to learn the necessity for the delay of pleasure, and in which the primary object of his libidinal cathexis, the mother, has rarely been absent. More precisely, when the mother has been absent, this has lasted only as long as the subject experienced no significant affective tension. Whenever affective tension increased, the child had only to cry out and his mother would reappear to satisfy the need for the discharge of his libidinal energies, presenting her breast to the child for feeding and rocking him back to sleep. However, insofar as the mother is herself subject to the demands of reality, the necessity arises for her separation from the child for increasingly longer periods. This no doubt comes as a shock to the child. Now, in his moment of need the mother is nowhere to be found. The child is left wanting for the very object that could be relied upon to provide relief in the past.

Every child must learn to accept this loss. As such, it should be possible to identify some commonplace behaviors in the course of development according to which this is achieved. We have all witnessed the occurrence of the behavior that Freud identifies as decisive in the child's development toward adulthood, in which she learns to deal with the loss. It is that in which the child throws some beloved object away from herself, such as her bottle, stuffed animal or toy. This activity is even made into a kind of game. And even after the caretaker again presents this object to the child, the whole activity invariably recommences, and the child throws it away once more. Precisely because it is repeated *ad nauseum*, such behavior is likely to generate some degree of exasperation for the new parent or caretaker who has never witnessed the movement of childhood development. Indeed, whenever an *adult* acts in a similar manner, fitfully throwing some valued object across the room in response to a jilting from one's lover for instance, this is rightly viewed to be an example of regressive, infantile behavior. Nevertheless, Freud actually sees in this activity a significant step *toward adulthood*. How can this be?

Our answer to this question delivers us once again to the heart of Freud's definition both of trauma and the process according to which it is overcome by the psychic apparatus. The fitful character of this behavior in the adult reflects the return of

the original traumatic loss. Additionally, it features the same behavior that has helped the child to *bind* this trauma; namely, throwing of some valued item away from oneself.

With regard to this behavior in the child, we should take note of an essential aspect of this activity that we have yet to elaborate. Despite the fact that it takes the form of a game, it is difficult to see how such a game could yield some measure of satisfaction or pleasure for the child. The discarded objects are invariably ones to which the child has displayed some attachment in other moments. If the libido theory is correct and what matters above all is the achievement of pleasure, then there remains something deeply mysterious about it.

Freud examines several possible solutions to this mystery. First of all, Freud sees in these activities the features of a transitional movement from a state of passivity to that of activity, which he identifies as an *instinct for mastery*. Secondly, insofar as the beloved item represents a partial object of the absent mother, he suggests that the activity may also be interpreted to follow from *a desire for revenge*. In this account, the bottle, for example, represents a surrogate for the breast; the soft toy, a surrogate for the feeling of the mother's embrace, etc.

> At the outset [the child] was in a passive situation—he was overpowered by the experience [of his mother's departure]; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part. These efforts might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not. But still another interpretation might be attempted. Throwing away the object so that it was 'gone' might satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him. In that case, it would have a defiant meaning: 'all right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself.' [16]

These interpretations of the game are extremely insightful with regard to the development of the pleasure principle, the reality principle, and the ensemble of mechanisms that assure these principles' supremacy; namely, the ego itself. It is not difficult to understand why Freud asserts that repetitions of an unpleasurable experience such as those that are transformed into the child's game can be said to be developmental precursors to the firm establishment of the dominion of the pleasure principle within the mental apparatus. Whether as a means of revenge or of the mastery of the excitation—in both accounts the game prepares the child to endure, and later even perhaps to enjoy these experiences that until now have issued only in displeasure.

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[16] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 16

The child must learn to accept the limits imposed upon him by external conditions. Not only does the child, in passing over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, become inured to the repetitions of the formerly unpleasurable experience, but by the assimilation of this activity to the preconscious ego they also function to generate a phantasm of control over the object. *He convinces himself that he is the one who chose to be rid of the mother.* Thus, beyond mastery and revenge, there is also an aspect of *self-beguilement* regarding the role the boy plays in the mother's disappearance to be found here. He persuades himself that he does not *suffer* the disappearance of the mother, but *actively dismisses her according to his own will,* and he imagines that this willful separation has the same distressful affect upon her as it has had upon him, thus *revenging* himself on the mother for going away from him.

The mastery of excitations is attended by a mastery of motor controls in which the child learns to grip the surrogate object more tightly in order to damage it or cast it away. But while the game does indeed involve a kind of motor mastery over the surrogate object, it no doubt misses its mark with regard to the true object of this activity; namely, the mother. However much the child may convince himself through this process that, because he can control the substitutive object, he also has the power to affect the original object of libidinal desire, the process really only pertains to the mastery of excitations issuing from his own libido. It is nonetheless noteworthy that Freud seems to hint at the possibility that this process may also generate for the child the phantasm of a capacity for mastery over the original object of desire—phantasmal precisely because it is accomplished only on the basis of the repression of an *impotent* libidinal desire. We must remember that the origin of this movement within the mental apparatus that culminates in a feeling of mastery was precisely the primordial *helplessness* of the child to satisfy himself. It is the product of a kind of reflux within the organism that arises as a result of its disappointments vis-à-vis the external world. In one sense, it does manage to make itself master of the excitations in this way—if only in the sense of accepting the departure of the mother—but, in still a deeper sense, it has merely *driven these desires back into its own depths.*

The original desire that the mother make herself available to the child remains, if now in a somewhat distorted form. Because the boy has conditioned himself to relate to the mother differently in spite of this desire, this conditioning becomes the basis

upon which further interactions with her unfold. What was originally a direct and immediate libidinal connection is substituted for a phantasm of autonomy and mastery that is temporalized according to precisely the repressed desire upon which it rests. The child's ego remains in a passive relation both with regard to the mother and to the unaltered desire for the pleasure that she once offered to him, and he has no real power to become active here. Thus, this is a kind of *performance* of real mastery that is imaginatively extended to the mother.

Nevertheless, from an economic standpoint this is already enough, since the child's efforts to adjust himself to external realities go only as far as the imperative for a reestablishment of stability within the mental apparatus demands according to the pleasure principle. And the reality principle, because it is not an epistemological principle but a psychodynamical one, certainly doesn't assure a correspondence between a belief or feeling of mastery over an external object and its actual mastery.

What was originally merely an exercise in acceptance may ultimately become a source of pleasure in itself. It is in this way that the child looses touch with the original purity of pleasure issuing from his mother's presence, and henceforth such pleasures may be forever alloyed with those associated with banishing her from the room. But from where does this sense of power originate if not from a *feeling* of having avenged the injury, visiting it back upon the mother herself. "Fine, go away! I can play that game myself. I didn't want you here to begin with." Such games represent an effort to structure relations in which to not only find occasions for release, but also to domesticate and master the external threats and obstacles to pleasure.

There is yet another noteworthy example from childhood development of this effort to master the object of desire that Freud does not mention in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. As the child increases in age, in order to advance the movement of development toward adulthood his parents undertake to wean him from certain infantile pleasures, such as thumb-sucking and being carried in the arms of the parent. To the appeals of the child to be held, for example, the parent now responds with a stern denial: "*No*, you are a big boy now, you can walk on your own!" Doubtless, this utterance of the word 'no' is among the first to have enormous implications for the child's affective life. Above all, it represents the denial of his desires. To the parent's utterance of this word the toddler often responds with an explosive emotional outburst—crying, screaming, kicking, scratching and a general non-compliance with

everything that he has been asked to do. Ultimately, the child will appropriate the perceived power of this word to himself. When he is asked to do some minor task that he has shown himself to be capable of at some other time, he proclaims "No!" as forcefully as he can. With this proclamation, he demonstrates his capacity to rebel against the order that has been imposed upon him by his parents. And when we consider the pathos with which this word is pronounced, it is clear that this is for him the most powerful word in his limited vocabulary. The toddler now tirelessly wields this weapon indiscriminately against both his parents and his playmates.

We may also view this impulse for revenge from a slightly different perspective. While it is true that the child seeks revenge for being deprived of the purity of pleasure that characterizes infantile sexuality, it is equally true that the desire for revenge follows from being compelled by the other to *develop* beyond his primitive state. This bitter taste for vengeance that begins with the original separation from the state of pleasure can persist in adult life, and through the mechanisms of transference it may manifest itself in other relationships. But what is especially remarkable is the *creativity* that is often apparent in these later efforts to get revenge. Though the impulse for revenge may originate with the frustrations of being compelled to develop, later one develops in order to get revenge!

Nevertheless, in the emphatic denials of other's will the child does begin to achieve a kind of genuine mastery over others. He realizes that he has the power to frustrate his parents, and some part of him delights in the feeling of having revenged himself for the frustrations that they have visited upon him. By contrast to the largely *imaginary* revenge of the former example, now we encounter a behavior that has proven to be *actually* effective in altering the affective state of the one who has denied the child his infantile pleasures, which is evinced in the obvious vexation of the parent who is disappointed by the behavior of the child.

Reflection upon this phenomenon provides us the opportunity to examine the origins of *negativity*, both with regard to how it manifests itself in the engagements of everyday life and also in its more advanced intellectual function. Furthermore, we can identify this moment of development with the origins of the *feeling of a lack* associated with the specific unpleasure of the denial of libidinal satisfaction, which the toddler attempts to transfer to others through his repeated efforts to deny them of their own satisfaction. Without committing ourselves to a careful inquiry into the affective origins

of dialectical thinking, we may nevertheless pose the question of whether this moment doesn't mark the period of development in which conditions for dialectics first finds purchase in the mind of the individual. It seems clear that this moment can be understood as one in which there emerges an *opposition* between the *fullness of being*, which can be associated with the nurturing presence of the mother, and the unsettling *emptiness* of her absence, which now supplies the affective basis for the concept of *nothingness*.

5. The Stupidity of the Libido

In Freud's view, this disturbing lack continues to haunt the subject according to the constitution of the ego—a disturbance which, to varying degrees, is bound to continue for the remainder of the life of the subject. Psychotherapeutic technique avails itself of transference neurosis in order to render the repressed traumatic memory of the disturbing event over to the preconscious ego. Compelling the subject to once again 'work through' (*durcharbieten*) the traumatic event in this way will result in a recommencement of the binding effort.[17]

It is hoped that this renewal of the effort to bind the source of traumatic excitation will be more successful than the initial effort, resulting in a diminishment in the disturbances that it provokes within consciousness. Nevertheless, we have seen that the success of this effort is by no means assured. It may be that there are forces on the path to recovery that inhibit the subject from reaching its destination that hold it back from its completion. Indeed, these forces were probably responsible for the failure of the original effort, and even for the subject's inability to give up his symptoms or to seek treatment for them. Nevertheless, the successful completion of binding is the most important moment on the path to development.

Without actually naming it, our entire analysis has circled around the invisible destructive drive that *inhibits* the subject's movement toward health—the very same drive that obstructed the original binding effort. What forces within the subject are responsible for this inability to overcome the disturbance? Why has the subject demonstrated itself to be so unreceptive to the new arrangements which have been

[17] Vol. 14, *On Metapsychology*, p. 288

imposed upon it from without? We can delay naming this drive no longer. Freud designates this collection of destructive forces within the organism *the death drive*.

This drive is not one that somehow infiltrates or overcomes the organism later in life. No, it must have been present from the very start. Freud even argues that there is a sense in which the operative forces in this drive *precede* those of the life instincts. But before we unpack this claim, let us briefly reexamine the active mechanisms within the neurotic subject. It will be noted that the *inertial* tendency that characterizes the death drive has been present all along in our account of neurosis.

Our image of the neurotic subject is that of one that stubbornly desires the return to the lost purity of childhood sexuality. Rather than adapting itself to its new situation and finding ways to evacuate its forces within the new arrangements of the adult world, we have seen that the libido of the neurotic instead withdraws to earlier positions in the course of its development, regressively reinvesting its energy in the fixations of infantile sexuality. To this regressive movement of the libido the repressive agency within the ego responds by coercing the development that reality demands, at least with regard to the outward behavior of the subject. Like the external censoring agency, the internal agency of the ego that acts on behalf of reality can to some degree *enforce* appropriate behaviors by *the inhibition of the movements* that provided the original path for discharging libidinal energies.

At this juncture, it will perhaps be illuminating to add yet another dimension to our account of the neurotic subject. There is one more technique that the mental apparatus uses in view of advancing the process of development; namely, *self-castigation and self-reproach*. These represent the principle instruments of what Freud, in his later, structural account of psychic life, will call *the superego*, which aims at something more than merely controlling the path of discharge.[18] The superego berates the ego with the aim of inducing it to entirely abandon its infantile desires. However, whereas the repressive agency within the ego does achieve some degree of success with regard to inhibiting the movements according to which discharge is achieved, the superego lacks the sufficient means of enforcement to compel the unconscious to give up its desires. Notwithstanding the reproaches of the superego, the subject's id nevertheless remains oriented toward infantile pleasure, and is either unwilling or incapable of giving up its regressive aim of returning to this state of pure pleasure—a fact that reveals *the inherent*

[18] Vol. 19, *The Ego and the Id*

lassitude and indolence of the drives. Because of this indolence, the sexual drives continue to rebel against the hysterical demands of superego by insisting upon their original aim, which provokes even greater resistance from the critical agency and exacerbates the conflict.

This discussion brings us before an important insight. It may be that our images of insurgency and rebellion are inadequate for capturing the nature of the conflict. Rather, the unconscious may be simply *deaf and dumb* to the calls of the critical agency. Perhaps it is the case that the drives are by nature stupidly resistant to development and the secondary processes.[19] This description tallies well with Freud's claims that the 'sexual instincts...are hard to educate.'[20] Why, if not because its reproaches always fall upon deaf ears, does the superego feel that its voice must become harsher and louder in its remonstrations against the instincts? Together with the inflexibility of desire with regard to its aim, this deafness of the sexual drives to the calls for development is a reflection of the power that the death drive exerts upon the mental apparatus.

Earlier, we portrayed the path toward the recovery from a loss as an arduous one. It was also said that there might be invisible forces hidden along this path that further complicate the movement back to health. We have understood matters in this way because the death drive rarely, if ever, appears in pure form as a 'beyond' of the pleasure principle. Insofar as it does reveal itself at all for the subject, it always seems to do so *in the shadow of this loss*—as the incapacity to move on from it that marks a lasting disturbance of the pleasure principle.

Only now has it become clearer what the invisible forces of the death drive do: they obstruct the subject's efforts to pass its cathexis on to a new and different object. They are also responsible for the inability of the subject to give up the hope for a return to the pleasures of infantile sexuality. But this account of the effects of the death drive upon mental life generates new problems. If the death drive is first of all responsible for the stubborn insistence of the aim of discharge that will later express itself in the pleasure principle, then why, in obstructing the completion of the work of binding, does it also seem to issue in the *frustration* of this aim? There appears to be something paradoxical in the claim that the death drive is at once responsible for the organism's inability to give up its insistence upon of the aim of pleasure while also undermining the

[19] Moyaert, P. (2013). The Death Drive and the Nucleus of the Ego: An Introduction to Freudian Metaphysics. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy,* 15, p. 97
[20] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 10

achievement of this aim through the reestablishment of the very principle that accomplishes it most effectively.

6. The Death Drive: Gravity and Repetition

In our discussion of the effort to bind the unpleasurable excitations issuing from the unconscious in the wake of the loss of the pure pleasure of infantile sexuality, we noted that this binding effort is characterized by *the repetition of the traumatic experience*. By this repetitious activity the subject passes from a state of passivity to one of activity, thus mastering the excitation and enabling the psychic apparatus to pass beyond the memory of the loss toward the present. This is the process according to which the dominion of the pleasure principle over psychic life is reestablished. In this regard, the repetitions of binding are not dissimilar in nature to those according to which habits are constructed. In these activities, the subject conditions himself through repetition to react to excitations without conscious thought. Just like the work of binding, the effort to build up a habit aims at the transformation of an aspect of psychic life into a mechanism that automatically manages excitations without allowing them to break into consciousness, thus maintaining the *openness* of consciousness so that it may attend to the task of protection against new threats which might emerge within the organism's environment or to other purposes such as those of cultivating new occasions of pleasure.[21]

Between the repressed instinct for the return to infantile sexuality and the effort to pass beyond its loss we thus discover an essential similarity: both involve the persistence of repetition. With regard to infantile sexuality, this repetition concerns the activities that generate pleasure itself. "The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of the primary experience of satisfaction."[22] With regard to the binding activity, the haunting return to the "distressing experience" reveals the same tendency for repetition; only now these repetitions pertain to the effort to move beyond infantile pleasures—a movement that, as we have seen, is demanded by reality and its avatar within the ego.[23] And finally,

[21] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* p. 21
[22] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 42
[23] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 15

with regard to the well-adjusted adult, we also discover these repetitions in the everyday practices of normal life. Freud traces this tendency for repetition to the instincts:

> How is the predicate of being 'instinctual' related to the compulsion to repeat? At this point we cannot escape a suspicion that we may have come upon the track of a universal attribute of instincts and perhaps of organic life in general which has not hitherto been clearly recognized or at least not explicitly stressed. It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of an inertia inherent in organic life. This view of instincts strikes us as strange because we have become used to see in them a factor impelling towards change and development, whereas we are now asked to recognized in them the precise contrary—an expression of the conservative nature of living substance.[24]

The death drive imposes a strict conservatism upon development, never letting it go further than external conditions demand, never further than is necessary merely to pass beyond the external obstacle to stability. It is the expression of an inertial tendency according to which all physical objects, whether living or non-living, tend ultimately toward the perfect stability of materiality. Just as inorganic objects are subject to the pressures of gravity, so also does the death drive exert a gravitational power over the organism. The inertial tendency takes as its object the libido itself, which implies that the libidinal forces of the organism do not *impel* it toward higher forms any more than there is something within the river that impels toward the sea—a fact that expresses Freud's tacit rejection of Aristotelian finalism. Rather, it is the *external force* of *gravity* that above all provides us with the best explanation for the demand for the release of the libidinal cathexis. The best that instinctual libidinal forces can do is to simply adapt themselves to the contours of external reality. That is, they are incapable of changing course unless acted upon by an external force. And because of the gravitational pull of the death drive, even this adaptation to external conditions may prove to be difficult. Thus, *the death drive is a force that holds the libido down, obliging it to suffer under the weight of its own being.*[25]

However, from another standpoint, we may also assert that, just as gravity provides for the unity of the river, *the inertial tendency of the death drive also provides the libido with its original unity.* Without the gravitational force that the death drive

[24] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 36
[25] Moyaert, 2013, p. 112

exerts upon the flow of libido, the latter could scarcely hold itself together. Rather, like a liquid in the weightlessness of space, it would simply burst into a multiplicity of discrete particles. And insofar as the unified flow of libidinal forces provides the organism both with its spontaneous animating principle and with its integrity, the organism itself would quickly disintegrate.

This comparison of the libidinal drive with those of the river that does not impel itself toward sea but is rather compelled by external gravitational forces to move in this direction will prove instructive going forward. To further extend this metaphor, we may compare the effort of binding with that of the construction of a dam that redirects and controls the flow water so as to circumvent the village in the valley. Our discussions have revealed that the binding effort is the essential moment on the path of development. As such, it serves several functions. Above all, it functions to build up mechanisms that aim at keeping excitations from overwhelming consciousness, thus maintaining what in *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* Freud refers to as its *restitutio ad integrum*.[26] From the developmental standpoint, binding obstructs the path of these forces back toward the residues of earlier iterations of the ego, and instead redirects the flow of forces emanating from the libido away from this its most primordial and easiest of paths.

If the bindings have been constructed adequately, then the passage of the river of energy flowing from the libido will be obstructed from flowing through *the low ground of infantile sexuality*. Rather, these forces will instead be directed into the system of reservoirs (cathexis) and drainage systems (discharge) that reflect the configurations that have been imposed by the external world.

Extrapolating from Freud's early assertions in *The Project*, we may wonder whether the opening that remains after this obstruction and redirection of libidinal forces is nothing other than consciousness itself. Where before there was a constant flow of forces issuing from the libido, now there is a clearing (what is called "*total facilitation"* in *The Project*) within which the organism maintains an awareness of reality, and the threats that wait within it.[27]

Binding can also be seen to exhibit a *qualitative* function, which is that of determining which sorts of excitations may be experienced as pleasurable and which

[26] Vol. 1, *Project for a Scientific Psychology,* p. 308
[27] Vol. 1, *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, p. 303

may not. Excitations which were originally sources of pleasure may, with the completion of the binding effort, be transformed into sources of unpleasure and conversely. As we have seen, the process of binding is initiated when the organism is deprived of some avenue of discharge which was formerly available to it. Whenever certain kinds of excitations overflow the bindings whose task it is to hold them back, this will invariably generate displeasure for consciousness, particularly in moments in which these sorts of excitations are inappropriate.

Once the pleasure associated with discharge has been inhibited from taking place by external conditions, the child must not only learn to accept the loss, but it is also to be hoped that he may learn to enjoy the new possibilities for pleasure that are opened up to him in the wake of this loss. We have already seen an example of this process in which what was originally a source of unpleasure is transformed into a source of pleasure, however impure this pleasure might be. In the self-beguilements of the child, he convinces himself that he actively wills the departure of the mother. Whereas before the relations with the mother were characterized by the univocal purity of pleasure according to which the flow of libidinal forces encountered no obstacle, now, with the emergence of the obstacles, these relations are marked with conflictual feelings between the ego and the unconscious. While the unconscious maintains its original orientation, the secondary processes have nevertheless triumphed over these tendencies within the unconscious at the level of controlling movement. For the unconscious, the triumph of the secondary processes probably issues in deep-seated feelings of aggrievement and disappointment regarding the jilting experience. As for the ego, the victory over the original orientation generates its own form of pleasure. The child may even convince himself that he *enjoys* his mother's departure, which provides us with our paradigmatic example of a transformation of an excitation that is distinctly unpleasurable into one that offers a yield of pleasure.

Before the commencement of this process, because the infant has yet to encounter objects which do not service his libidinal needs, the object of his pleasure is inseparable from his aim. This means that, for the child, *the mother is the apotheosis of pleasure*. In this regard, the life of the infant may be compared with the prelapsarian lives of Adam and Eve. Like God's first children, the infant lives in a state of paradise within which he is wanting for nothing. Given that the child experiences no separation from the object of pleasure, he has yet to become a subject for himself. However, as

the mother withdraws, this generates a rupture in the immediately pleasurable relation with the original object of libidinal cathexis. This rupture represents the primordial narcissistic wound of mental life. It manifests itself as a *difference within the ego between aim and object*, and corresponds with the first emergence of a conscious lack within the subject. And with this first moment of disappointment, we are confronted with *the subject's original moment of desire.*

This forcible differentiation of object and aim whereby the aim must hereafter realize itself with a substitute is received with great affective upheaval. The primordial wound is thus responsible for the commencement of developmental processes. The excitations emanating from this wound must be bound if the subject is to win the clarity that he will need to go forward into the world. The wound provides the impetus for the development of his perceptual and motor faculties whereby he learns to *distinguish* between those objects that promise to deliver him back into the state of pleasure and those which do not. When the wound is healed and the confusion is overcome, this confused difference between desired aim and object articulates itself as a distinct difference between self and world, thus providing the coordinates of subjectivity and objectivity upon which the pleasure principle and the reality principle may do their work.

7. Conclusion

Though it may be true that the death drive has been present from the start of psychic life, this truth nevertheless remained for a long period unseen and unarticulated within psychoanalytical study. Though the psychoanalyst can convincingly explain almost all behaviors in the course of psychic life on the basis of the libidinal drives and the frustrations that they undergo because of their confrontations with external reality, it has proven more difficult to identify instances of behavior that positively exemplify the death drive in its purity. If the death drive remained undetected within psychoanalytical science for the longest time, then this is because above all it manifested itself as a feature of the libido itself—that is, as *libidinal insistence*. The libidinal instincts thus remained the primary point of focus. The redirection of these instinctual forces was understood to follow first of all from an encounter with externalities, which were then

internalized within the ego as a repressive agency that functions as an internal avatar of reality.

Psychoanalytic technique thus sought to reconfigure this internal avatar of reality, reconciling it to the present and bringing it into greater accordance with reality itself. How the analyst initiates this process is by bringing the patient back to the moment of the original trauma. Such a confrontation invariably results in affective disturbances that are in many ways indistinguishable from the persistent repetitions of the symptoms within daily life. By appreciating this likeness between the disturbances that arise when the memory of the traumatic event is brought before consciousness and those that afflict mental life in one's engagements with the present, the subject can be induced to perceive that the latter disturbances do not follow from some present external cause but rather from an event within one's own past. That is, the subject will realize that the genuine cause of his affective disturbances are not to be found among the objects of the perceived present, but that the real cause of these affects is rather to be found only in his own past. The present objects represent only the *pretext* for the reassertion of his own traumatic memory—which is to say, they are not the efficient cause of his disturbances but merely their occasion.[28]

To overcome the neurosis the subject must be brought to confront the memory of the painful separation that precipitated it. With the hope of teasing the subject's traumatic experiences out of the obscure depths of his unconscious and into the light of consciousness, the analyst avails himself of the transference neurosis in order that the subject might come to see his symptoms as the expression of a moment of his own past. Transference neurosis is of course the principal tool of psychoanalytic technique, whereby the patient is forced in some measure to *relive* the original trauma in his engagements with the analyst. Now, the analyst functions as the representative of the external force that initially obstructed access to the pleasures of infantile sexuality.

There is thus a sense in which, because he is responsible for initiating the transference neurosis, the analyst comes to represent the disruptive external agent that first separated the subject from his pleasures. Now, with the help of the analyst, the subject may learn to deal with this obstructing externality all over again, working through the original trauma and "forcing [the repetitions that manifest as neurotic

[28] Moyaert, 2013, p. 101

symptoms] into the channels of memory," thereby rendering them over to the past where they belong.[29]

The therapeutic process is thus one of altering the power that a distressing memory exerts over consciousness, and this is accomplished by transforming what formerly revealed itself as the repetition of symptoms into conscious remembrance. Through this process, the senseless repetition of symptoms can now be provided with a meaning and traced back to the encounter with some external force that has forcibly separated it from the purity of pleasure that characterizes infantile sexuality, issuing in the primordial would of psychic life.

However, this confrontation with the original traumatic memory is but the first step along the path to health. Together with revealing the true cause of one's disturbances, psychoanalytic technique seeks to bring about the recommencement of the binding effort. The persistence of neurotic symptoms reveals that the original binding effort was not equal to the task of preventing libidinal forces from disturbing consciousness. Upon conclusion of the renewed binding effort, it can be hoped that the patient will learn to accept the loss, thus rendering the memory over to the past where it belongs and liberating consciousness for new engagements with the present.

Though psychoanalytical technique had seen its share of success in relieving neurotic patients of their disturbances—successes that proved that psychoanalytical theory was on the right track—it would be the all-too-frequent *failures* of this technique to bring about the desired result that would provoke Freud to rethink libido theory. Why were some neurotics so stubbornly resistant to confronting the basis of their illness even after the commencement of transference neurosis, and why did others revolt so strongly against the termination of treatment? Why did some war neurotics find themselves incapable of giving up their symptoms after the conditions of war were brought to a close? And finally, why were depressives incapable of transferring their cathexis on to a new object?

These subjects remained incapable of placing the loss in the past where it belongs. As these failures accumulated and the early optimism diminished, Freud was brought to confront the limits in understanding and technique of psychoanalytical science. Until the period of the development of psychoanalytical theory that culminates with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, what comes forward most boldly in Freud's

[29] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 19

account of the traumatic loss of infantile sexuality is primarily the *negativity* of this experience. Because of this emphasis upon subjective loss vis-à-vis some external power, it could be that Freud was unable to detect the *active* forces at work behind this phenomenon within the subject itself. We may even wonder whether Sigmund-the-subject's *intuitions* with regard to his own mental life—intuitions which were confirmed and reinforced through psychoanalytical practice—stood in the way of the development of the more properly objective insights of Freud-the-scientist. It is conceivable that he was still too influenced by the interpretation of the subjective data of his own inner life and that of his patients. For him, the dimension of loss stood in sharp relief because, *from the perspective of the subject*, this is apparently what plagues mental life first of all.

This failure of the psychoanalytical theorist to detect the influence of the death drive follows from the fact that, whenever the libido passes its cathexis on to a new object or activity, the death drive straightaway retreats behind the pleasure principle in such a manner that it no longer reveals itself nakedly as a drive for senseless repetition, and now the 'negativity' that plagues the organism at least to some degree diminishes. With the retreat of the death drive behind the pleasure principle, the libidinal drives appear to regain their original dominion over the organisms, reinvesting themselves in the world and providing it with a sense of direction and meaning.

What Freud and his team of researchers failed to see above all was that *the forces of constraint were not only to be found outside of the organism*. If the analyst fails in his effort to initiate the process by which the trauma is externalized in the past where it belongs, this is because there is a drive that inhibits this process by persistently exerting itself within the present. Or rather, to be more precise, the death drive inhibits the organism from ever fully giving itself over to the present, anchoring it inescapably in the past.

Most importantly, *this past cannot be entirely identified with the original traumatic memory itself*. Just as the present external objects provide a pretext for the repetition of the neurotic symptom's emergence, we may also say that the moment in the past in which the first agent to separate the child from his pleasurable situation provides merely the occasional cause of the organism's reaction against the forces of reality. The inertial tendency is always already built into the structure of the libido from the start. The encounter with the first external obstacle only supplies the occasion for it to reveal itself as such.

The exteriority against which the libido reacts is therefore not located somewhere within space outside of the organism. *It is rather an exteriority that the organism carries deep within itself.* These forces have been present within the organism from the start as a kind of lifeless exteriority that the subject forever carries within itself, which inhibits it from development beyond its primitive state. Though this exteriority resides deep within the organism itself, it is still more radical than anything that the organism has encountered in the perceived exteriority of its surrounding environment. In the transference neurosis the analyst may in some way come to represent to the patient the external power that originally disrupted the pure pleasure of infantile sexuality and thereby provide the opportunity for the subject to once again work through the original experience of separation from infantile sexuality. In this way, the analyst makes himself available to the patient as a kind of avatar of the one who disturbed the easy flow of libido toward its aim. However, unlike the one who provoked the original disruption of infantile sexuality, *the exteriority of the forces of death can have no specific avatar.* Paul Moyaert strikes the right note with the following comment:

> It should be clear that accounting for this shock in terms of the pain of separation from the mother is insufficient. Instead, it would be more fruitful to understand this shock in terms of the organism being burdened by the *weight of being*. Freud's death instinct is another word for this gravity inherent to life. In melancholy, loss incarnates this gravity; for individuals with different dispositions, something else will embody that gravity.[30]

The forces of the death drive are more original than even the libido itself, both with regard to the external object to which it was originally attached (the mother) and the object (the father) that may have initiated the original trauma by obstructing the path of desire. As such, the subject can no more thwart these forces than it can reverse the forces of gravity.

As we have seen, whatever development the organism undergoes is always precipitated by an encounter with a force that acts upon it from without. We may now say with conviction that, if the organism were at once guaranteed satisfaction for the libido, provided with the necessities of life, and safeguarded against external forces that might interfere with this situation, then no development would take place. In other

[30] Moyaert, 2013, p. 112

words, if the organism could somehow remain in a womblike state for the duration of its life, it would exhibit no tendency for differentiation or development. The stable, unbroken libidinal connection with the object that provides it with pleasure would be quite enough. This means that the forces of life exhibit no deep spontaneity or power of self-transcendence. They merely aim at self-perpetuation.

The death drive exerts its gravitational pull in every moment of development, forever inhibiting the organism from moving to a more advanced stage. If there is development in nature, this is only because the organism has had to take more circuitous routes to its original goal of death. From the beginning, the libido has been subject to the forces of the death drive. These forces seek only to commence the organism back to the state of perfect stability that is to be found in inorganic materiality.[31] The persistence of life can be attributed to the fact that the libido continues to generate forces which, in accordance with the death drive, must then simply be "lived off."[32] The tenacity of life follows not from some deep desire for development and differentiation but merely from the fact that the forces of life continue to regenerate themselves.

Still, this would appear to leave unanswered the question of why it is that the life instincts came to oppose the return to inorganic matter to begin with. If the life instincts are not by nature opposed to the return to inorganic matter, then how may we explain the durability and self-insistence of life? This is a question that asks after the very nature of life. For his part, Freud refuses to speculate on this difficulty, opting instead for a kind of positivistic modesty: "The attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception."[33] All that can be said is that, at some point in the history of the earth, inorganic matter underwent some chemical transformation whereby it became organic, and that this transformation was above all responsible for life's capacity for self-perpetuation and regeneration.

The effect of the death drive is first of all *to compel the libido to maintain its current direction.* Recalling our comparison between the flow of libidinal forces and that of the river toward the sea, the death drive is no more interested in serving the secondary processes of the ego according to which the pleasure principle maintains

[31] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 62
[32] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 55
[33] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 38

dominion over mental life than gravity is interested in serving the purposes of the construction of the dam. Nevertheless, just as the dam itself depends of the forces of gravity in order to accomplish the function of creating a reservoir which can be released according to man's purposes, so also does the pleasure principle rely upon the death drive to maintain the downward directionality of libidinal forces, only now according to the configurations within the ego that have been accomplished through binding.

By this comparison we have arrived at some understanding of what Freud means when he claims that the death drive does not work in the service of the pleasure principle. Rather, the pleasure principle, "whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation," works according to the pressures that are exerted by the death drive.[34] But this can only take place once the bindings have been constructed. If the death drive can sometimes undermine the reestablishment of the dominion pleasure principle over mental life, this is because the inertial force does not only exert itself over the libido itself, but also over the effort to construct the bindings. The death drive is thus responsible for the original orientation of libido and for the laboriousness of the effort to construct the bindings.

We are now in a position to answer the question of how the death drive can be both responsible for the organism's inability to give up its insistence upon of the aim of pleasure while at the same time undermining the achievement of this aim through the reestablishment of the pleasure principle. Just as the death drive is responsible for the attachment to the repetitions of pleasure within the original situation, now, in the process of binding the flood of excitations issuing from the libido, it manifests itself again as the repetition of the trauma of separation. Or, to put this slightly differently, just as the subject was before fixated and held up by the pleasures of infantile sexuality, now it gets held up within the process of binding.

The subject desires a return to the lost purity of infantile sexuality because it represents that moment in the course of life that approximates the perfect stability of death. If the subject cannot give up the desire that has generated his neurosis, this is not only the result of "a weak point in the sexual function," but because there is something at the core of what he is that has reacted against the life from the very start. In Freud's view, this dark exteriority that reacts against time, consciousness and becoming dwells deep within us all. When Freud says that "we are all ill—that is,

[34] Vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 62

neurotic," this is because there is no way for us to finally give up the desire for a return to the pleasure of infantile sexuality and ultimately to death itself.[35] The most that can be done by the analyst is to attempt to hide the death drive as much as possible behind the pleasure principle, with the hope of inducing this naked force of senseless repetition to retreat behind some of mode of living that promises pleasure for consciousness. At least with this, the subject can learn to enjoy his slow return to death.

[35] Vol. 16, *Path to the Formation of Symptoms*, p. 358

HEGEL AND NIETZSCHE

4

What Does the Master Really Want? Development and Structure in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Hegel takes the abolition of slavery to be a sign of historical progress and detects in the efforts for liberation of slave classes the outlines of the universal movement of historical struggle toward freedom. Among the chief inhibitors of historical progress is the slave's inclination to misinterpret his own condition, not at the level of the ideas of freedom, dignity and justice—since for Hegel these genuinely represent the aim of the slave and, through him, the aim of history itself—but this misinterpretation occurs at the affective level. It is *fear* for his natural life that immanently orients the slave's conduct, and as such he is inclined to misconstrue the broader meaning of his struggles with the master. While the slave believes that his struggles amount to a simple effort to release his own bodily self from a situation in which his natural life is threatened, the genuine meaning of these struggles, when seen from the speculative position of the dialectical philosopher, relates not to the preservation of the slave's bodily self but to the realization of a dignified future in which slavery and irrational domination is finally abolished.[1] Nonetheless, the slave's susceptibility to his own fear for his natural life renders him vulnerable to the imposition of the master's order. It is precisely this susceptibility to fear that maintains him in his position of slave and as an object within this order. The slave must realize that what is most essential is a future in which he is

[1] See §178-196. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit.* Edited by J.N. Findlay. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. From here onwards, references will be abbreviated with PS.

free. When he does, he will be unafraid to engage the master in mortal struggle and will release himself from his yoke, whether in freedom or death.[2]

1. Is the Satisfaction of the Master Sensuous or Social?

In his *Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit,* Alexander Kojève also emphasizes the role that risking one's natural life plays in this deadly game of recognition:

> Man's humanity comes to light only in risking life to satisfy his human Desire—that is, his Desire directed toward another Desire [...] To desire the Desire of another is in the final analysis to desire that the value that I am or that I 'represent' be the value desired by the other: I want him to recognize my value as his value. I want him to 'recognize me as an autonomous value. In other words, all human, anthropogenetic desire—the desire that generates Self-consciousness, the human reality—is, finally, a function of the desire for 'recognition.' To speak of the 'origin' of self-consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for 'recognition'.[3]

Man differs from animal in the following way: *he is willing to risk himself for something more than life alone*. In order for the slave to be recognized as something beyond a mere animal, he must refuse to submit himself to the domination of the master, thus risking his natural life for the sake of his Desire. But this refusal is fraught with danger. The master promises destruction to those of his subjects who refuse to obey his commands. As long as he is captivated by his fear of destruction, the slave will never stand and fight, and so he will never gain the recognition or the respect of the master. For this recognition, the slave must conquer his fear of death. In the preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel offers this consolation against this fear:

> Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life

[2] Dennis Schmidt also examines the obstacles to historical progress in "Why is Spirit Such a Slow Learner?" in terms of the master's affective captivations with satisfaction and the slave's with his fear of death. *Research in Phenomenology* 32, 2002.

[3] Kojève, A. (1980). *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit.* (A. Bloom, Ed., & J. H. Nichols, Trans.) Cornell: Cornell University Press. p. 7

> that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself.[4]

Because it is irreducible to the individual living thing, spirit forever recovers and reorients itself in the wake of material destruction. As such, the physical death of the slave in his individual struggle does not imply the end of history's drive toward freedom. The slave's death is just one instant in this epic struggle, and whatever dignity this death has derives from the way in which he instantiated a moment of the movement of spirit in his struggle for freedom.

To understand the master's obliviousness to spirit, can we not simply invert the immediate condition of the slave? One is trapped by the finite desire to escape the whip, the other by the finite satisfactions that are secured by wielding it. In the case of the master, rather than being affected by fear and deprivation, the captivation occurs at the level of the satisfactions he enjoys from being a member of the prevailing order. Each is held fast by confusions that issue from his position relative to the other and, as such, each is largely blind to the infinite movement of spirit. The master's satisfaction explains his insistence upon his own finite mediation of the present, and why he has little interest in persevering to the absolute end in which he would be finally reconciled with the slave. In other words, it is just this insistent repetition of this selfsame, singular mediation upon the present that precludes the future unfolding of spirit's possibilities. It is because of this that for the better part of history 'freedom' for one has meant death or subjection for the other.

As long as both master and slave are held fast by the sensuous particularities of natural consciousness—the slave by his fear for its destruction and the master by his pleasure in its satisfactions—the advance of spirit in which the subject overcomes alienation and unifies with itself cannot take place, and alienation and suffering will persist. Given as they both are to immediate affect and desire, they are devoid of a genuine sense of futurity. Their hopes do not extend beyond the promises or possibilities of the day, either to find sensuous satisfaction in it or simply to survive it, and they have not learned to risk themselves for anything more than this. In the dialectic we find the movement by which spirit learns to hope for something more—namely, a future return to itself in the fullness of self-consciousness and freedom which

[4] PS §32

marks a final overcoming of alienation and suffering. And because risking oneself for this freedom engenders real progress toward it, this is no idle hope.

With regard to the master's satisfaction, our definition remains ambiguous, and would appear to admit of two distinct articulations. The first articulation would concern *social status*—that kind of satisfaction that follows simply from being acknowledged as master. The second articulation would concern our *bodily existence*—a kind of *feeling* of animal life. Which of these better describes the precise nature of the master's satisfaction that prevents him from recognizing the dignity of the slave? Is it the kind of satisfaction that stems from being unilaterally recognized by the slave as his master, or is it the sensuous or animal satisfactions of the body, or is it perhaps some harmful alloy of the two? It is clear where Kojève stands on this question. For him, the master's satisfactions follow primarily from the recognition that he is the master:

> Without [a] fight to the death for pure prestige, there would never have been human beings on earth. Indeed, the human being is formed only in terms of a Desire directed toward another Desire, that is—finally—in terms of a desire for recognition. Therefore, the human being can be formed only if at least two of these Desires confront each other. Each of the two beings endowed with such a Desire is ready to go all the way in pursuit of its satisfaction; that is, is ready to risk its life—and consequently to put the life of the other in danger—in order to be "recognized" by the other, to impose itself on the other as the supreme value; accordingly, their meeting can only be a fight to the death.
> [...]
> One must fear the other, must give in to the other, must refuse to risk his life for the satisfaction of his desire for 'recognition.' He must give up his desire and satisfy the desire of the other: he must 'recognize' the other without being 'recognized' by him. Now, 'to recognize' him thus is 'to recognize' him as his Master and to recognize himself and to be recognized as the Master's Slave.[5]

In Kojève's view, the master wants to be loved without loving, to be satisfied without satisfying, and he threatens to take the life of the slave for the sake of his desire for unilateral recognition. As brilliant as it is, we have to wonder whether this exposition doesn't miss something important about Hegel's image of the master. Though I do not want to deny that, for Hegel, recognition is an essential element in understanding why the master threatens the life of the slave, to say that he is above all driven by "the prestige of recognition" is, in my view, to misinterpret the confused consciousness of the master—a confusion wherein it mistakes a consciousness or sentiment of the sensuous

[5] Kojève, 1980, pp. 7-8

particularity of its own finite body for self-consciousness and thereby confuses animal desire with properly Human Desire, bodily satisfaction with the realization of genuine freedom. In the above passage, Kojève offers a kind of ontological account of the relationship between the master and the slave, as if both master and slave are from the beginning oriented primarily by the desire for recognition from one another at the level of individual self-consciousness. It is as if the master is simply the winner of a game for which both the stakes and the rules are apparent to all players at the outset. In foregrounding this ontological account, there is a danger of obscuring the dynamic unfolding of spirit's development that *culminates* in the demand for mutual recognition, thereby leaping past these developments according to which the problem of recognition first articulates itself in historical struggle. Furthermore, we must consider whether this tendency to leap beyond the specificities of the historical struggle between master and slave can be found in the *Phenomenology* itself—whether Hegel also doesn't have a tendency to vacillate between the ontological and the dialectical accounts of this relationship, thus attributing to the master a desire for recognition that only first fully articulates itself in the slave.

2. The Mastery of Sense Certainty

In the chapter entitled 'Self-Consciousness', Hegel has this to say about the movement of synthesis that characterizes it:

> Consciousness, as self-consciousness, has a double object: one is the immediate object, that of sense-certainty and perception, which however for self-consciousness has the character of a negative; and the second, viz. itself, which is the true essence, and is present in the first instance only as opposed to the first object. In this sphere, self-consciousness exhibits itself as the movement in which the antithesis is removed, and the identity of itself with itself becomes explicit for it. [6]

What prevents the overcoming of the antithetical relation between the immediate objects of sense-certainty and perception, and consciousness' unity with itself in which the first moment is synthesized within the second? What holds consciousness fast in this opposition? Something obstructs this movement, but what is it? It can only be

[6] PS §167

something within this immediacy that captivates consciousness, thus preventing it from returning into itself as genuine self-consciousness.

To answer these questions, let us examine for a moment the first figure of immediate knowing which is, as Hyppolite argues, "decisive for the interpretation of [Hegel's] philosophy."—that of sense-certainty.[7] Here we find a form of natural consciousness that involves an immediate apprehending and appropriation [*Auffassen*] of the objects that present themselves to consciousness. This, as Hegel announces, is "a knowledge of the immediate or of what simply is" and it is supposed to offer the clearest picture of the object.[8] Because of the way that sense-certainty seizes on the object itself, it would appear that this is the richest kind of knowledge. That is to say, its richness relates to the way that it is *untarnished by negativity*—a negativity which could only diminish its shining, compelling power, weaken its certainty, and introduce the possibility of a questioning disposition with regard to the object. However, against a straightforwardly empiricist view of knowledge which holds that, because of its richness and pure positivity, sense-certainty represents the truest form of knowledge, Hegel counters that it is precisely this very richness and certainty that disposes us settle into the inverted viewpoint of natural consciousness, which is a primitive form of consciousness in which the universal miscarries into either a falsely essentialized 'I' or 'thing.' Far from making it more compelling, the very *certainty* of sense-certainty, which follows from the force and richness of the immediate, actually renders it *poor in truth*. What is it, after all, that makes the immediate so rich if not a refusal to confront its deficiencies? This attitude of pure positivity and certainty forecloses on further interrogation, and arrests the effort to discover a truth beyond sensuous immediacy. It is a sensuous richness that is won at the expense of spiritual poverty.

In the moment of sense-certainty, consciousness is reduced to a relation between a singular 'thing' and a singular 'I.' And this 'I' is characterized *not* by its genuine desire for the universal—a desire that issues in an unrelenting effort to pass beyond the particularities of sensuous life toward a higher, more inclusive synthesis—but rather by the way that it founders in the present 'richness' of the immediate.

> I, *this* particular I, am certain of this particular thing, not because I, qua consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; and also not because *the thing* of which I am certain, in

[7] Hyppolite, J. (1997). *Logic and Existence.* (D. J. Schmidt, Ed., & L. L. Sen, Trans.) Albany: State University of New York Press. p. 15

[8] PS §90

> virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things. Neither of these has anything to do with the truth of sense-certainty: here neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation...On the contrary, the thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*. It *is*; this is the essential point for sense-knowledge, and this pure being, or this simple immediacy, constitutes its *truth*.[9]

However, Hegel tells us the being of both the 'the thing' and the 'I' is not such a simple matter. Sense-certainty is not immediacy itself, but an instance of immediacy that already always bifurcates along two lines—the 'thing' and the 'I', the object and the subject—the pursuit of which leads us further and further down a path of dialectical mediation that has them ceaselessly crossing over and intersecting one another until they finally converge. In other words, this bifurcation already marks the first primitive mediation between object and subject, between 'this' object and 'this' I, and introduces the question of the *being* of the 'this'. However simple and direct this relation might seem, Hegel undertakes to demonstrate that within it we find a kind of opening for self-conscious reflection that goes as much beyond immediacy toward self-transcendence as it does beyond the 'this' toward their others both in space and in time. (In this regard, like Heidegger and Bergson, Hegel can be seen to commence a critique of presence in which an absence or negativity makes an unremitting appeal to the 'now' and the 'here.')

Consciousness never simply registers or represents its objects in the manner of a mirror of immediate presence. It is, in its relations to its objects, forever haunted by a hidden conflict—there is always an unseen scratch in the tain of immediate consciousness. The rich and powerful presence of the immediate conceals an unexamined mediation in which the "sheer being of the thing" that is present in sense-certainty is held back from the interrogatory movement of dialectical becoming and a possible future that goes together with it. This uninterrogated mediation is always my own contribution, but to the degree that I refuse to submit the being of sense-certainty to dialectical examination, I will never understand this fact. The present 'I' has selected from the flow of becoming what is relevant for its own experience, and it has done this not only at the expense of the remainder, but also at the expense of its own future. When the painstaking labor of the negative is undertaken, it can be seen that the 'thisness' of sense-certainty depends entirely upon a more or less arbitrary exclusion of

[9] PS §91

what is not 'this'—an exclusionary act which is performed both with regard to the time of the this (the 'now') and the location of the this within space (the 'here').

In view of this problem of localizing the truth of sense-certainty in the 'sheer being of the thing,' can we not simply transfer the certainty of sense-certainty from the object to the 'I'? Now it is the 'I' that appears as the basis of the truth of sense-certainty. Shifting the basis of certainty from object to I implies that

> the object, which was [beforehand] supposed to be the essential element in sense-certainty, is now the unessential element; for the universal which the object has come to be is no longer what the object was supposed essentially to be for sense-certainty. On the contrary, the certainty is now to be found in the opposite element, viz. in knowing, which previously was the unessential element. Its truth is in the object as my object, or in its being mine [*Meinen*]; it is, because I know it.[10]

But this proves no more helpful than the former explanation. The whole labor must commence again, the problem being merely displaced from the object to the I—that is, whereas before the difficulty was localized on the side of the object, now it reasserts itself on the side of the I. The truth of the immediate, individual I with regard to the object springs merely from that fact that 'I' *assert* that the object is 'this' rather than 'that', 'now' rather than 'then.' One's certainty does not follow from the careful development of an understanding of the rich complex of connections and relations to other things, but from merely pronouncing oneself to be right, and either evading any awkward questions about the basis of this certainty or threatening those who ask them. Now every appeal from another for an answer to the question of 'Why?' can only end in their disappointment or, at best, with the paternalistic declaration, 'it is so because I said so.' Nevertheless, this truth equally dissolves when it is seen that we can no more say what this 'I' is than what the thing is.

In this regard, sense-certainty resembles a kind of shell game. In the first moment of the game, the universal and the certainty that follows from it is believed to reside with the object. But as this shell is lifted, the universality that is supposed to be in the immediate object is not there, and now one straightaway shifts the certainty over to the other shell, that of the 'I.' The shells are again shuffled, and because the player never asks to see under all of the shells at once, the whole game recommences in endless repetition, without ever arriving at a final resolution. If the player demanded to

[10] PS §100

see under the shells, he would discover that there is nothing there, that the universality that he searches for resides neither in the immediate object nor the immediate 'I,' and that the whole game is really just an elaborate con. But why, if not because he is afraid to lose his wager, does the player decline to ask to see under all of the shells at once? If the game goes on indefinitely, he stands to lose nothing. But he also does not gain anything—indeed; he misses the opportunity to exit the game. If the game concluded, in despair he would walk away with nothing. But since this nothing is essential to realizing his freedom, this would prove to be a gift.

One can no more find essential being behind or within the immediate 'I' than one can find it behind the immediate 'object.' In both cases, their essence always slips into their others and pervades conscious experience broadly.[11] Hegel concludes his examination of sense-certainty with a rather obscure passage. In it Hegel conveys with wry humor the way in which the use or consumption of an object amounts to its negation:

> We can tell those who assert the truth and certainty of the reality of sense-objects that they should go back to the most elementary school of wisdom, viz. the ancient Eleusinian Mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus, and that they have still to learn the secret meaning of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. For he who is initiated into these Mysteries not only comes to doubt the being of sensuous things, but to despair of it; in part he brings about the nothingness of such things himself in dealing with them, and in part he sees them reduce themselves to nothingness. Even the animals...do not just stand idly in front of the sensuous thing as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up.[12]

Like the rest of nature, man's dealings with the things of sense-certainty are largely utilitarian. In his use of material beings, man need not possess some profound knowledge of their being in order to discover their nothingness. He must simply consume them. And so, it is not only in consciousness as such that we pass beyond the being of the This toward their others, but also in our practical involvements with the natural world.

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[11] 'The Here pointed out, to which I hold fast, is similarly a this Here which, in fact, is not this Here, but a Before and Behind, an Above and Below, a Right and Left...What is pointed out, held fast, and abides, is a negative this, which is negative only when the Heres are taken as they should be, but in being so taken, they supersede themselves; what abides is a simple complex of many Heres.' PS §108

[12] PS §109

In our exploration of sense-certainty we have discovered that, while it appears at first blush to be a very simple thing that is easily understood, it is really a very strange thing that, to borrow a phrase from Marx, "abound[s] in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." Marx would no doubt find inspiration in this critique of sense-certainty for his own account of 'commodity fetishism.' In both Hegel and Marx's view, the thing is something to be used and consumed by man—it is decidedly *not* something before which we should stand in awe as though it were the manifestation of essential or intrinsic being. When taken as it should be, this object exists only as a negative; that is, it exists as something which possesses no value or meaning beyond its use by and for man. Just as "those who assert the truth and certainty of the reality of sense-objects...have still to learn the secret meaning of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine," so too must those who assert the objective value of the commodity (re-)learn the primary instrumental value of the object with regard to its social use.[13] Furthermore, only by forgetting or ignoring the mediation of human labor according to which the commodity was produced, does it emerge as an object of value in itself. The double concealment of the essentially social movement of *creation* and *use*—which is always an *act* that involves transferring a fundamentally social need over to an fetishized object—is the condition for the translation of the singular value of *this* object into a general or universal system of valuation (money). The relation between the eye that sees and the object seen is undoubtedly a relation between physical things, but an intrinsic meaning and value is never to be found among these present physical properties. The eye itself never simply *sees* positive, intrinsic meaning or value. Only man can apprehend this value, and this must always involve going beyond the thing toward the other, whether in a movement mystification, such as we find in sense-certainty, or in genuine understanding of the rich complex of connections between the *this* and its others that begins with perception and culminates in understanding.

These observations become even more interesting when we realize just who Hegel's principle antagonist is in these sections on sense-certainty—namely, John Locke, the father of modern liberalism. Both here in the early moments of the *Phenomenology* and also in *The Philosophy of Right* (§34 – §70), though he never refers to him by name, Locke's philosophy is plainly the target of Hegel's attack, not only at the ontological and epistemological levels, but also at that of the political. Now

[13] Marx, K. (1992). *Early Writings.* (R. Livingstone, & G. Benton, Trans.) New York City: Penguin Books. p. 42

is not the time to commence a detailed discussion the latter, but in light of what we have discovered regarding sense-certainty, it is not difficult to see the implications of one for the other. The structure of sense-knowledge mirrors that of property relations as liberalism understands them. The 'thing' is immediately available for possession by the 'I.' Furthermore, both the 'thing' and the 'I' are endowed with essential being, and their relatedness functions merely augment and enrich one another.[14] Whereas Locke believes that the 'I' is already fully formed in the state of nature and has only to take possession of what is immediately available to it in sense-certainty, Hegel argues not only that this 'I' is far from a natural endowment that arrives on the scene fully constituted, but also that the thing of sense-certainty always already exhibits mediation. Both subject and object must pass through a movement of development, and this implies an intimate involvement with its others in and through language.[15]

These discussions have driven home the irreducibly social character of the 'This,' which, for Hegel, has always to be understood according to the fundamentally *linguistic* dimension of man—a dimension that accords him nothing less than a "divine nature."[16] If the essence of the sensuous particularity of the 'this' can never truly be represented (or *owned* by the individual), every effort to do so must involve a perversion of language which makes of it something that it is not. Far from representing genuine essences, an attempt is made to compel language to represent only what is inessential (the particular 'I' or the particular 'object'), and as such it is reduced to the

[14] With this, we find ourselves better equipped to understand Marx's descriptions of the movement by which value is transferred from the fetishized object to the owner of the object, and the way that the individual augments deficiencies in his own being by means of money, possessions and property: "The stronger the power of my money, the stronger am I. The properties of money are my, the possessor's, properties and essential powers. Therefore, what I *am* and what I *can do* is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy the most beautiful woman. Which means to say that I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness, its repelling power, is destroyed by money. As an individual, I am lame, but money procures me 24 legs. Consequently, I am not lame. I am a wicked, dishonest, unscrupulous and stupid individual, but money is respected, and so also is its owner. Money is the highest good, and consequently its owner is also good. Moreover, money spares me the trouble of being dishonest, and I am therefore presumed to be honest. I am *mindless*, but if money is the true *mind* of all things, how can its owner be mindless? What is more, he can buy clever people for himself, and is not he who has the power over clever people cleverer than them? Through money, I can have anything the human heart desires. Do I not possess all human abilities? Does not money therefore transform all my incapacities into their opposite?" (Marx, Early Writings, 1992, p. 377)

[15] Thomas, P. (2004). Property's Properties: From Hegel to Locke. *Representations* (84), 30 - 43.

[16] PS §110

status of an *instrument*. Nevertheless, language never really cooperates in this movement of its own perversion. Hegel asserts that "the sensuous this that is meant cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal."[17] Every effort to communicate the particular 'this' can only but turn against itself. Hence, even in the mode of sense-certainty, our propositions betray a truthfulness that is inherent to language itself—a truthfulness to which we are inattentive when we attempt to restrict the 'This' of sense-certainty to the particular 'here' and 'now' by excluding their others. Whatever we really *mean* to say in sense-certainty does not get said, and by attempting to say it, we have already refuted what we mean. In truth, the 'this' always announces the '*universal* This,' or '*Being in general*,' and is irreducible to the distinct sensuous presence to which we 'envisage' or believe ourselves to refer.[18]

When the negative that is hidden within is permitted to disturb sense-knowledge, the *certainty* of its object begins to evaporate. And as it discovers that what it is can no more be found in the object than in the 'I,' its true essence begins to come forward. This essence is in *both* as a primordial relatedness between them that can be realized in and through language alone, which always involves not only the 'I' but also the 'they'. Opening oneself up to the negative implies acknowledging that the universal is announced in every utterance, and that I do not have the power to designate the now or the here according to my own impulse or whim. Each of these terms lends itself to its others. Ever designation depends upon the rich complex of connections with others that are not themselves designated. Whenever I merely use language for my own selfish purposes, I have bastardized it and fundamentally misunderstood its true nature. Rather, to borrow a Heideggerian formulation, *language is the house of the universal*, and whenever I enter there, I lose my identity as a particular 'I,' and must relinquish my sensuous particularity in favor of what dwells there. More precisely, when I enter there, rather than losing my individual identity and sensuous particularity, I am brought to realize that *I never really had them to begin with*, that they belong among of the divers ephemera and delusions of natural consciousness.

Sense-certainty exemplifies the initial stages of natural consciousness; it at once exhibits a tendency for dialectical bifurcation and also a conflicting tendency for

[17] PS §110
[18] PS §97

inhibiting the process of bifurcation and foundering in the present here and now. In its first moments, dialectical interplay involves a proliferation of differences between object and subject, and it is just such an interplay that makes learning from one's experience possible. Without this infinite dance of displacements within which 'subject' and 'object,' 'I' and 'thing,' 'here' and 'there,' 'now' and 'then' constantly give way to one another, the experience of the object is condemned to stagnation and stupidity. Sense-certainty, because it arrests this dance, is just such a stupidity.

Now we can begin to understand how the master comes to believe that he alone rises to the level of essential being. As one in whom the confusions of natural consciousness continue to hold sway, the confrontation with the negativity in himself never happens. And because he believes that he can augment any deficiencies in his own being merely by taking possession of the other that is immediately available to him, the master is encouraged in this effort. Every dialectical displacement between 'I' and 'other,' here and now, is recaptured and arrested under the sign of the master's 'I.' The same is true for the slave—only now the displacements are recaptured under the sign of the other 'I' that is the master's. But the belief that the master is the essential being is wrong: indeed, there is no essential *being* (except, of course, that which can be found in the reflected unity of spirit). Rather, what is essential is the infinite *becoming* of self-consciousness: "Essence is infinity as the supersession of all distinctions, the pure movement of axial rotation, its self repose being an absolutely restless infinity."[19] In the master, we have someone who, because he refuses to confront the negativity in himself, also refuses this movement of supersession. And, if in coming to suspect that the being of the master is really a kind of shell game and a confidence trick, the slave confronts the master with this negativity, he is either ignored or threatened. In order to realize true essence, both the master and the slave must realize that he who has claimed essential being is not this at all. He too must pass beyond the contingent particularities of sensuous immediacy.

We are brought before the questions with which we began: What is it that *inhibits* the movement according to which the master passes beyond the sensuous immediacy of life? Why does the master appear to *refuse* to confront the negativity in his own being? We have already suggested a name for what produces this abortive movement of the subject—*bodily satisfaction*. It is true that with this suggestion we have

[19] PS §168

ventured a hypothesis that takes us beyond the strictest kind of textual analysis. Nowhere within *The Phenomenology of Spirit* does Hegel make the explicit claim that it is 'bodily satisfaction' which inhibits the master from coming to confront his own negativity. As we have seen, he does speak of the confusions of sensuous immediacy in terms of sense-certainty, but never does he go so far as to name the bodily cause of these confusions. Just as Hegel hesitates to name the "non-actuality" of death in §32 of the Preface (and yet he does name it), so is he also reluctant to name this non-actuality of sensuous particularity that obstructs the master's becoming, electing instead to highlight its dialectical confusions. The reason for Hegel's reluctance is clear. If, as Hegel claims, the universal is announced in every utterance, how can we bend language to the task of naming a tendency that issues only in singularities? This tendency is excluded from the process of historical development, and forms a residue of prehistory that continues to insist upon itself in the present. Nevertheless, can we venture a name for this non-actuality which issues in the insistence with which the master holds to his confusions? Hegel comes so close to naming it himself in the term "sensuous immediacy." And what is another name for this if not *sensuous feeling*? As Kant would say in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* when distinguishing it from the higher form of feeling that is found in the judgment of taste, this is a feeling that is devoid of "universal validity," a "mere sensory taste" [*bloßen Sinnegeschmacks*].[20] In the master's case, it is nothing more than an exciting feeling of sensuous pleasure vis-à-vis the slave/object.

We have already mentioned the way that, for the slave, what looms largest is the menacing presence of a master who threatens to take his (individual) life. For the master, it is the inverted satisfaction in his situation vis-à-vis the slave/object. Both are characterized by their state of natural consciousness. "Appearing immediately on the scene, they are for one another like ordinary objects, independent shapes, individuals submerged in the being of Life."[21] As it stands, each produces in the other a tendency to reinscribe him/herself in immediacy. Whereas when the slave sees the master, he gets carried away with his immediate fear for his natural life, the master sees in the slave only a source of immediate satisfaction for himself. In both cases, this non-actuality of affective immediacy has contaminated the relation with the concrete perceived object,

[20] Kant, I. (1922). *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (5th ed.). Leipzig: Der Philosophische Bibliothek Band. p. 79
[21] PS §186

disallowing it to pass beyond toward its others. Their mode of immediacy has yet to fall entirely under the sign of the negative, and continues to provide the basis for one's sense of oneself, however illusory and transitory this basis might be. To realize this, the consciousness of each must pass through a moment of pure negativity with regard to the immediate objects of sense-certainty—this is the condition for its return to itself for-itself as a form of Desire that transcends the affective contamination of consciousness, and the origin of the sense of futurity beyond the sensuous immediacy of nature. For this experience of the independence of the object to happen, consciousness must suffer its alienation or separation from it—an experience that the master, by virtue of his position as mastery, never really undergoes.

This experience of pure estrangement from material reality is typified in the situation of the slave. Indeed, the master plays an essential role in creating this situation, unwittingly fulfilling the condition for the slave's realization of what he is essentially. Because of his attachment to the concrete thing of sense-certainty, the master, in his sensuous self-insistence, enforces a separation between the slave's consciousness and the object by taking it for himself. Along with the rest of nature, he uses the slave and the products of his labor for his own sensuous enjoyment. Whereas the master finds in the immediate object the positive basis for his feeling of himself, because this object remains out of reach and unavailable to the slave as a basis for his enjoyment and his feeling of self, the slave finds in the very same object only a moment of the negative. The latter is disallowed from finding satisfaction in the world and, in thus finding it to be devoid both of love and of pleasure; he is ultimately driven back into his self-consciousness where he discovers himself as *pure desire*. Only now does life point to something beyond itself. Only now the slave realizes that he is *more* than a living thing. And with this, the slave finds the courage to overcome his fear of losing what the master threatened to take from him—namely, his own natural life.

3. Self-Consciousness and the Process of Life

The process of life is the movement of separation from the inorganic, in which there is a solidification of the immediate fluidity of becoming into independent shapes, or being in-itself. The latter

> comes forward in antithesis to the universal substance, disowns this fluid continuity with it and asserts that it is not dissolved in this universal

> element, but on the contrary preserves itself by separating itself from this its inorganic nature, and by consuming it. Life in the universal fluid medium, a passive separating out of the shapes or becomes Life as a *process*. The simple universal fluid medium is the *in-itself*, and the difference of the shapes is the *other*. But this fluid medium becomes the *other* through this difference; for now it is *for the difference* which exists in and for itself, and consequently is the ceaseless movement by which this passive medium is consumed: Life is a *living thing*.[22]

In this description of the way that the independent shape passively distinguishes itself from the fluid medium and emerges as being in-itself, then holds itself apart from this differential flux and, wheeling round on it, consumes or destroys it in order to preserve and satisfy itself, do we not notice the broad formal outlines of the life of the master, only in this case raised to a higher level of magnitude and made reactive? Both master and slave are, of course, living things. Both must consume to survive. As organisms, both are the product of this movement of separation from a fluid continuity. But unlike the slave, precisely because the master already finds sensuous pleasure in his mode of separation, he remains still too riveted to the specific shapes of his own life. For this reason, he consumes the element out of which he has emerged without acknowledging that it is universal or that it represents the basis of not only his own life but also of life itself, of which he is merely a moment. "Life consists rather in being the self-developing whole which dissolves its development and in this movement simply preserves itself."[23] But in Hegel's view, this active insistence upon the specific shape marks a reaction against *the process of life*, since this process is *both* the movement of separation into distinct moments of being in-itself as living things, and the dissolution of these distinct moments in favor of new ones which are themselves more inclusive with regard to the universal element out of which they initially emerged, or being for-itself.

This individual maintains himself at the expense of this universal. He has withdrawn himself from the fluid unity of becoming, has established himself as a specific thing distinct from this flow, and now he remains insistent upon this specificity. Because he refuses the movement of return to the unity of the original simple substance and because of the way that he is fixated on the specific shapes of life as he knows it, his consciousness remains undeveloped. Only in the movement of return is this original

[22] PS §171
[23] PS §171

unity—a unity which was, before the movement of withdrawal, merely the confused immediacy of becoming—only then is it transformed into a *reflected* unity.

> Contrasted with that immediate unity, or that unity expressed as a [mere] being, this second [unity] is the universal unity which contains all these moments as superseded within itself. It is the simple genus which, in the movement of Life itself, does not exist *for itself qua* this *simple* determination; on the contrary, in this *result*, Life points to something other than itself, viz. to consciousness, for which Life exists as this unity, or as genus.[24]

The genus of life is distinguished from that of consciousness only when it realizes that it does not exist for itself vis-à-vis a simple determination. Life must itself fall entirely under the sign of the negative in order for consciousness to truly come into its own as *self*-consciousness—this is the condition for the emergence of the 'I' in its spiritual purity, which already always exists in relation to the 'we.' Without this total negation, the 'I,' insofar as it does emerge at all, will remain still too rooted in immediate being, suspended in confusion between its desire for the immediate spatial objects of life that are presented to it and human Desire, which essentially transcends space and these objects toward the other's Desire. In order for consciousness to understand itself as Desire as such, the desire for the immediate objects of life must go unfulfilled. This individual consciousness must be prevented from appropriating and folding these objects into itself, and thereby realizing itself in a confused way as a moment of (merely apparent) objective identity in sensuous satisfaction. While it is true that, as Hegel says, "self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness," because the Master has not risen to the level of *pure* self-consciousness, because the 'I' is for him still too alloyed with the sensuous particularities of natural life, 'satisfaction' for him above all means possession and consumption. As long as his insistence upon the pleasures of possession and consumption continues to be realized, the master's 'I' never fully rises to the level of pure self-consciousness. By contrast

> The 'I' which is the object of the Notion is in fact not 'object'; the object of Desire, however, is only independent, for it is the universal indestructible substance, the fluid self-identical essence. A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as object. With this, we already have before us the Notion of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence. 'I'

[24] PS §172

> that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'. It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind the colorful show of the sensuous here-and-now and void of the supersensible beyond, and steps into the spiritual daylight of the present.[25]

The realization of the "'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" amounts to "the reconciliation of its individuality with the universal."[26] Genuine self-consciousness arises in precisely the moment at which consciousness realizes that it is irreducible to the objects of nature toward which it was formerly directed. If consciousness remains invested in these objects and discovers in them the basis for its own self-certainty, it can only but fail in its effort to find its pure self. To the degree that self-consciousness emerges at all, it exists as a confused mixture of object and 'I', a muddled alloy of in-itself and for-itself. This confusion explains the way that the desire of the master remains oriented toward consumption, possession and pleasure. He fails to see that the slave is something infinitely more than a *means* for his own sensuous satisfaction, and that the slave is, like himself, purely for-himself in the mode of the in-itself.

Self-consciousness is the condition of genuine freedom. Freedom means letting go of the body as horizon of the "the colorful show of the sensuous here and now." It means bringing this sensuous here and now totally under the sign of the negative. Only when this is done can consciousness realize its own autonomy from the body and "find its turning point" that leads back to the reflected unity of spirit. Because of this newly realized irreducibility of consciousness to object, this consciousness must search for a new basis for its sense of itself, and this it finds only in recognizing, and being recognized by, the other as a moment of spirit. Within this reflected unity man finds the former objects of his desire transformed into mere shadows of the infinite, and he relinquishes his efforts to enjoy them for himself at the expense of this infinity. If they are to be truly enjoyed, then this enjoyment can only unfold within this infinity. With this, these objects are recuperated as moments of self-reflective freedom, and man finally becomes just as much as much 'we' as 'I'.

What within history marks the turning point that leads humanity back to the reflected unity within which master and slave can reciprocally recognize one another as equals? We have spoken briefly about the way that the master functions to dispossess

[25] PS §177
[26] PS §165

the slave of his own sensuous body, and how this dispossession amounts to an opportunity for the slave consciousness to realize itself as pure Desire beyond the body. It is with this realization that the slave reaches his turning point. He does not need to own property, to command a position of influence within the existing institutions of society, or even to exhibit the outward features of 'human being' as it is understood by his given historical epoch. His arrival at the turning point has nothing at all to do with these externalities—except, of course, that he has been totally deprived of them. Because his condition is characterized mainly by privation and lack, his situation with regard to these conditions can only be defined negatively. It is on the basis of his Desire alone that the slave might first assert himself as human, and as deserving a level of dignity and respect that has hitherto been reserved for the master alone. But if the slave's deprivation is the necessary condition for the movement of absolute abstraction by which all (of his) immediate being is rooted out, it is not sufficient. The slave has, after all, only appeared as pure Desire to *himself*, and it remains for him to reveal himself to the master as pure being-for-self, or as self-consciousness.

> The presentation of itself as pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific existence, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life. This presentation is a twofold action: action on the part of the other, and action on its own part. In so far as it is the action of the other, each seeks the death of the other.[27]

To the degree that a man is not willing to risk his natural life for the desire to be recognized by the other, his humanity remains hidden. But this hiddenness pertains not only to the slave, but also to his master, who is still too immersed in the immediacy of nature to acknowledge a Desire that transcends it. Thus, if the master risks his life, it is not yet entirely for recognition as such. He may also want recognition, but like the slave, his Desire is mingled too confusedly with the urgencies of animal life, and thus it gains no priority over them. For the master, however much he might reserve for himself the distinction of 'human being', this urgency expresses itself as a desire for animal satisfaction. For the slave, because he is weaker than the master and yet must share the world with him, this urgency expresses itself simply as a will to survive. If the master has risked his life, it is not primarily for recognition, but mainly for this animal satisfaction.

[27] PS §187

Because of this double captivation—of fear for his animal life in the slave and of satisfaction with animal pleasures in the master—man's difference from the animal, which is motivated entirely by the instinct for self-preservation and for animal satisfaction, does not manifest itself clearly. The slave must risk his life to break the master's trance-like captivation with the pleasures of bodily satisfaction. He must do one of two things: either threaten to tear out the master's immediacy root and branch, to forcibly impose upon him the same separation from the body that he has endured, and to destroy him if he should resist or, in realizing that he provides for the master's satisfaction with his own hands, he must simply refuse to continue satisfying his desire for pleasure with his work. With this, the master will be confronted with a tenacity and a resolve that can only arise through Desire as such. And with this, he will be confronted with a true exemplar of humanity. This is the master's turning point.

Not only is the master himself lacking in pure self-consciousness, insofar as the slave does not risk his life in a sustained effort to free himself from bondage, the master is also never confronted with it in his traffic with nature. The slave must expose himself to the master "in the form of pure being-for-self, or as self-consciousness" in an act of rebellion.[28] In this regard, the master has yet to meet with a genuine exemplar of humanity, and so from his perspective the slave remains on the side of nature in its immediacy as yet another means to his own enjoyment. And, to reaffirm our divergence from Kojève with regard to the master's supreme concern for recognition, if the master has no reason to admit the humanity of the slave at the outset, how could the slave's acknowledgment that the master is indeed his master accord to the latter a sense of "prestige?" Because the slave has not yet risked his life for recognition and thus demonstrated his humanity, there could no more prestige for the master in commanding slaves than that which derives from the obedience of his horses. Robert Pippen summarizes the "conventional view" of Hegel's master-slave dialectic in the following way:

> [The acknowledgment of the slave] is worthless to the Master because he is recognized by one whom he does not recognize and because the acknowledgment is coerced, cannot be assumed to be genuine submission, and so is dangerously more like a temporary truce than a victory. The Bondsman, by submitting, has for the Master been

[28] PS §190

> reduced to the level of animal life and so the Master's resolve to realize the mastery that he claims is thwarted. [29]

Doubtless, the conventional view cuts close to the crux of the matter, but I want to argue that it nevertheless marks a critical confusion regarding the development of the conditions for the problem of recognition to first emerge, one in which the essential structure of human being as a being of Desire for whom recognition is the central problem has yet to be articulated. This conventional interpretation, expressed so succinctly by Pippin, assumes that the master is motivated primarily by his desire for recognition. But if because of his immediate involvement with the natural pleasures of mastery the master is less concerned with recognition from the slave than with his submission, then the victory over the slave matters less than the pleasures that follow from this submission. From this standpoint, the slave represents to the master nothing more than a means to his own enjoyment. Indeed, as Pippin says, as long as the slave remains submissive, he remains at the level of animal life, and has not appeared to the master as a human who is even capable of recognition. And yet the conventional view continues to assume the primacy of the problem of recognition even for the master, who is frustrated because he does not realize the mastery that he claims. Whereas Kojève has his master ascribing intensionality to the slave in order to account for a satisfaction that follows from being unilaterally recognized as master, Pippen's master is dissatisfied precisely by the apparent lack of intensionality in the slave, and the incapacity for recognition that follows from this.

The master is characterized by Hegel chiefly by his "attachment to natural existence," and this explains the way that he exists as a moment of "pure being-for-self"– his immediate self-certainty derives from this attachment.[30] In other words, it is precisely in the mode of a natural being that the master is for himself. From the master's perspective, the immediate truth of his being is to be found chiefly in the enjoyment of his natural life, not primarily in the prestige of recognition or victory over the slave. The emphasis on the primary concern for 'victory' or the 'prestige' of recognition also runs contrary to a striking historical fact; namely that, throughout the

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[29] Pippin, R. (2010). *Hegel on Self-Consciousness.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 63. Though Pippin's chapter arrives at similar conclusions to what presented here—namely, that we must account for the development of the conditions for the problem of recognition to first emerge—he arrives at the conclusions by a very different path.

[30] PS §194

history of slavery, the very humanity of the slave was often strongly denied.[31] If prestige in the eyes of the slave were so supremely important, then it seems clear that his humanity would have been affirmed rather than denied. Prestige is only a matter of importance among equals. And in this regard, the slave represents for the master yet another "unessential, negatively characterized object" of nature, characterized primarily by its "thingness."[32] Just like the beast of burden, the slave remains immersed in the immediacy of nature. Far from being motivated by his desire to be recognized by the slave as his master, the latter often denies the slave's very capacity for recognition or respect, and concerns himself mainly with the enforcement of obedience for his own enjoyment. Slaveholding may have been a matter of prestige within the society of the master, but certainly not with regard to the slave himself.

For these reasons, the *problem of recognition would appear to arise firstly on the side of the slave*—an interpretation that accords with Hegel's broad position that it is with slaves and the oppressed that we discover the vanguard of spirit. Only after this problem of recognition has been articulated can reason really begin to make its advance and become solidified in the form of the social and legal institutions of the state. And so it is with the slave's first articulation of the problem of recognition that the preconditions of rationality begin to emerge, and historical reason makes its first giant leap forward. Kojève's famous quote about the prestige of recognition goes together with an ontological or structural account of the relation between master and slave, and its truth can be grasped entirely on this basis. But we must be careful to separate the ontological analysis of this relationship from the specificities of its historical development—a distinction that Hegel himself scarcely makes in the *Phenomenology*. In his analysis of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Robert Solomon points to the same ambiguity in Hegel, and to be fair, it is this ambiguity that might explain the very confusions to which Kojève has succumb:

> Hegel is not at all clear about the relationship of general self-consciousness to specific self-consciousness. It sometimes seems as if the general self-consciousness is already formed at the outset of the

[31] Aristotle in the *Politics*: "Indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life." Plato in *Gorgias*: "Nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker; and in many ways she shows, among men as well as among animals, and indeed among whole cities and races, that justice consists in in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior."

[32] PS § 186, 190

> master-slave confrontation, which is concerned with the determination of the specific sense of self. But a good case could also be made for the argument that Hegel first establishes specific self-consciousness through the original meeting and then introduces the formation of the general sense of self-consciousness through the life-and-death struggle.[33]

We are confronted with a problem of genesis. If "general self-consciousness" is already formed, then the problem of recognition can be said to be primary in the original meeting of the master and the slave. In this light, Kojève's account in which the concern for the prestige of recognition is supreme would appear to be accurate. And while this claim appears to be legitimate from the lofty standpoint of the dialectical philosopher who has detected in nature's development, even from its most primordial beginnings, a broad movement toward the recovery of itself in the reflected unity of self-consciousness, it falls short when we account for the specific consciousness of the master, who like the slave before him had to be *compelled* by his other to move beyond consciousness toward self-consciousness. In this light, what we have called the 'ontological' or 'structural' account is itself conditioned by the historical development of a higher dialectical rationality within which nature broadly can be realized to be driving toward understanding and recognition. We find the nascence of the development of this higher rationality in the moment that the slave realizes himself as pure Desire and as a self-consciousness that is irreducible to the living thing that is his own body. With this he becomes unafraid to challenge the master, knowing as he now does that he is something infinitely more than this individual body, and that the loss of his own natural life does not imply the end of self-consciousness of which he is merely a moment. Only now, from the standpoint of this higher rationality, it can finally be seen that even at the level of living nature, individuality is always haunted by a latent conflict; it needs to complement itself in another individuality, as Hyppolite claims.[34] Insofar as the master—together with the rest of nature—is "haunted" by this need, he too must be oriented in his own way toward recognition. But this does not necessitate that at the

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[33] Solomon, R. C. (1985). *In the Spirit of Hegel.* Oxford : Oxford University Press. p. 445. Unfortunately, Robert Solomon only goes to far as to point out this *aporia* in Hegel's thought without articulating his own answer. Fredric Jameson similarly asks the question of to what degree the moment of "the Master/Slave dialectic is to be considered an historical event and to what degree it is a persistent structure" and "whether these two perspectives can somehow be combined dialectically." His answer: "it is an open question—which is to say that it is a question I am tempted to answer negatively." Jameson, F. (2010). *The Hegel Variations: On the Phenomenology of Spirit.* New York City: Verso. p. 75.

[34] Hyppolite, 1979, p. 159)

level of his own consciousness that his interest is first and foremost one of recognition or that he is dominated by his concern for 'prestige' vis-à-vis the slave.

Hyppolite's image of the haunted master goes together nicely with an observation of Pippin, who notes that Hegel makes the "rather extraordinary claim that the unjustified exercise of mere power itself creates a form of dissatisfaction and suffering visited on those *exercising* such power, and in a way that makes it plausible to assume that such positions of domination and submission cannot long stand."[35] Nevertheless, the master persists in his mode of separation and thus remains oblivious to this unarticulated need for recognition. Though it may haunt him—perhaps preventing him from getting good sleep—it remains unarticulated as Desire, and thus gains no real purchase in how he structures his relations with others. It could even be the case that this disturbance drives him to seek the pleasures of mastery more tenaciously, to insist upon and repeat precisely that order which is responsible for the haunting disturbance. This most human of desires is still too removed from his consciousness and the concepts according to which he understands himself. As a being that is divided between animal life and human Desire, between sensuous satisfactions and a unarticulated need for community with other human beings, he is lacking in the pure self-consciousness that is the basis for a demand for recognition. As such he does not understand that mutual recognition promises infinitely more satisfaction than does bodily pleasure. By contrast, the role of the slave in history is to be the first being for whom sensuous being is disentangled from spirit, body from mind, and space from time. He is the first to experience the pure difference between himself and the world, and it is within this difference that he realizes the singular importance of a recognition that is based on one's spiritual value alone.

[35] Pippin R., 2010, p. 64

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Suffering as Negativity or Necessity? Hegel and Nietzsche on the Master/Slave Dialectic

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a philosophical *Bildungsroman* that sketches the movement of nature's maturation. This story begins with nature in a state of naïve, bewildered childhood, then traces its development into its adulthood in which it willingly accepts the necessity of an laborious effort to learn about itself, and which finally culminates in a ripe, knowing maturity wherein it enjoys the products of its own "labor of the negative."[1] This movement of nature's development is best personified in the historical relation between master and slave. It is a relationship that begins tumultuously, with suspicion, discord, and convulsions of violence. However, because the slow yet inexorable awakening of rationality bends history toward justice, the discord between master and slave yields to a growing sense of reciprocity between them. Ultimately, enmity gives way to reconciliation and mutual recognition, and the opposition between master and slave is overcome.

In this chapter, we pick up the thread from the former chapter in which we examined Hegel's understands the first "unmediated" moments of this relation between master and slave. We will ask the question of whether we cannot already detect an error in this image of the master that falsifies (his) nature in a very fundamental way. Far from yielding maturation, such an error could perpetuate—even propagate—a tendency within nature toward immaturity, weakness, and stupidity. Furthermore, such an error could serve to inhibit the emergence of superior types. It was of course Nietzsche who

[1] PS, Preface §19

first highlighted this error, and it will be Nietzsche who provides us with the broad outlines for our critique. This error concerns the way that the master is understood to be captivated by the affective satisfactions associated with his position of mastery. As we established in the last chapter, Hegel asserts that it is the master's insistence upon these satisfactions that inhibit the development of a consciousness of the necessity for going beyond the specific, one-sided mediation that perpetuates the injustices of slavery. We will consider whether Hegel doesn't falsely characterize the master's drive for power, and thereby falsify what could be the highest and most important expression of nature's vitality.

By way of passages from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, we will consider whether this error is really a mere *mistake*, or whether it is actually productive and useful for securing the conditions of existence for those who cannot endure the aggressive creativity of the powerful. In the *History's* portrayal of the Melian response to Athenian aggressions, we discover not only the first shoots of dialectical thinking, but we are also given some sense of the conditions under which this kind of thinking appears; namely, in situations of danger and vulnerability. On this basis, Nietzsche views Hegel's thought as something rather less dignified than a philosophy that simply favors the slave because the represents the 'vehicle of spirit'—it is viewed as a philosophy of the slave and, even more damningly, *a slavish philosophy.*

Finally, we will examine Nietzsche's own image of this relation between master and slave. In this image, the utility of mystification and deception is emphasized as an intractable feature of all relations within nature. What distinguishes the master from the slave is not that one is honest and the other deceitful, but that one possesses the capacity to acknowledge the necessity of deception. And because the creative master is strong enough to see becoming for what it is—that is, a movement without orientation, purpose or meaning—he can embrace the necessity of the creation of forms which impose order, direction and stability upon life. Relating to this, we will see that the master separates himself from the slave in another critical way. His aims differ from the slave's in that he is not motivated by satisfaction or respite from danger and pain. Rather, he is driven by an insatiable will to creative mastery. Unlike the slave, the master does not hold that pain is a reproach against life.

1. Hegel on the Master and the Slave

As we discussed in Chapter 4, Hegel finds the contours of the universal movement of historical struggle toward freedom within the efforts for the emancipation of the slave classes. Nietzsche finds in these efforts only *a drive to exist at any price*—the very same drive "which makes stunted plants push their roots into arid rocks." All of the slave's cries for dignity, freedom and justice aim only at delivering him from suffering. The "phantasms" of the dignity of man and the dignity of work are nothing but the slave's "transparent lies" and represent an effort to hide from the hopelessness of his condition.[2] For the same reason, the slave imagines for himself a future in which the violent externalities of nature, including the master himself, are finally rendered manageable and brought into line with his own modest capacities. He then transforms these products of his own imagination into weapons of morality, using them to measure and condemn a reality that in comparison with these images appears terrible, oppressive and violent.

If someday freedom is actually to be shared by both slave and master, then they must mutually recognize one another's spiritual dignity, understanding that this dignity is something in which they both participate rather than something that is reserved for one and excludes the other. Though it bends imperceptibly toward justice and the harmonious resolution of its ongoing battle with itself, time remains out of joint until the day when the last master recognizes the last slave to be free. For Hegel, it is precisely this out-of-jointness of time that drives the dialectical movement of becoming. Whether he believes that time is to be brought back into joint through a final synthesis in which freedom is realized as a historical universal, or whether the movement of history is asymptotic in nature and the ideal synthesis that marks the "end of history," as ideal, is never actually realized—this is the source of much discussion among Hegel scholars, though it is not our concern at the moment. What is paramount for our purposes is Hegel's image of becoming: it is the movement by which nature progressively overcomes its own self-estrangement and comes back to itself in the fullness of conscious understanding, culminating in the master's discovery of himself in the slave

[2] "The Greek State" in Nietzsche, F. (2008). *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings* (Revised Student ed.). (K. Ansell-Pearson, Ed., & C. Diethe, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 165

and conversely. Concealed behind the historical roles that each living, breathing, suffering man plays, spirit soundlessly drives toward just this moment of discovery. Even as becoming plunges these men headlong into the horrors of war, spirit endures the conflagration and always "finds itself in absolute dismemberment."[3] War doesn't only destroys the finite, historical Concept, it provides spirit the occasion to reorient and recompose itself in a more self-realized form, and ultimately further diminishes nature's estrangement from itself. The horrors of war draw slave and master alike down into the impersonal cauldron of bodily suffering, thus melting down those hardened sovereign formations of the master that obstruct the progress of spirit. Far from being mutilated by the fires of war, spirit finds in them new opportunities for its advance. In this way spirit prevails upon history with a new lucidity.

Hegel's affirmation of the superiority of Christianity to what preceded it follows not only from the fact that the Christian god is part man but also, and no less importantly, because *He is a god who suffers*, and it is precisely this suffering that joins His lot with that of man. F.W.J. Schelling, whose affinities with Hegel exceed those of a youthful friendship, goes so far as to assert that

> God is a life, not merely a being. But all life has a fate and is subject to suffering and becoming. Without the concept of a humanly suffering God all of history remains incomprehensible.[4]

The God that wears a crown of thorns by his own choice consecrates suffering, and through it, history itself. Because it engenders the desire for self-transcendence, suffering is the negative that drives being beyond itself toward ever-fuller articulations of freedom. But, in spite of this sanctity, suffering is in another sense also *an offense*. As the unsettling attendant of every finite social order, it is the unsightly, withered twin of a fattened, cruel satisfaction—a twin that refuses to hide the meanness of its condition. This twin resurfaces as a persistent indictment of every new social order in which the ideal of freedom is not realized. Eventually, this indictment insinuates itself into a reproach against life itself, insofar as the latter recurrently submits to mediations that generate so much pain. And finally the value of life can only be redeemed through the diminishment of the suffering that accompanies slavery. But even if the slave falls to the violence of the positive order of a superior power—perhaps *especially* if he falls to this

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[3] PS, Preface §32

[4] Schelling, F. (2007). *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom.* (J. Love, & J. Schmidt, Trans.) New York City: SUNY. p. 274

violence—because he embodies the suffering exterior of the current order, he represents the necessity and urgency for the further development of spirit. In this way, he advances the cause of freedom as a martyr of the absolute.

2. The Dangers of the Vanguard

If, as Hegel believes, the negative is the real motor of historical movement, then it is the dialectical historian who is the vanguard of spirit. He is the one who possesses the tenderness and sensitivity of feeling that enables him to comprehend this movement of the negative, suffering this movement only as god must suffer it. But we must be careful to emphasize that Hegel holds that suffering is not something to which we must blindly submit, but that it must be overcome in a superior synthesis of intellect. Suffering really only marks the limit of the finite concept. This means that as the concept extends its domain or is replaced by a less one-sided concept, suffering diminishes along with it, and the hostile alterity of immediate nature becomes gradually more domesticated. But if our historian merely remained on the side of the positive order and did not surpass its limits toward suffering, he could not comprehend those dark currents that disrupt the institutional petrifications of the state. Though he aims at "mastering the particulars," this does not mean that he privileges one moment of becoming over another. Whether negative or positive, the dialectical historian must love every moment of this movement in order to comprehend it fully. Loving the positive involves "abiding in the subject matter" and "comprehending a concrete and copious fullness in terms of exact determinations." Loving the negative involves "looking it in the face and abiding with it"—it involves a willingness to suffer at and beyond the limits of these exact determinations, which in turn engenders a desire to extend the concept's range and accordingly diminish this suffering beyond the limit.[5]

Just as for the slave the real value of existence derives from the hope and the struggle for the future realization of the ideal of justice and freedom, so also is this true for the dialectician. What separates the dialectician from the slave is only the way in which the dialectician shuttles between his comprehension of the current social order with its respective finite concept on the one hand, and the rational negation of this concept on the other, always with an eye toward arriving at a superior synthesis between

[5] PS, Preface §32

this opposition that would diminish the estrangement from the other. Whereas the dialectician moves fluidly between the exact, positive determinations of the finite concept and its negation, the slave is condemned to suffer on the side of the negative.

But here we find ourselves confronted with one formulation of that most bothersome of theological questions—the very same that threatens the prospect of its undoing and, as such, opens up a terrain that is uniquely Nietzschean; namely, what distinguishes a love for everything from a love for nothing? If the dialectician must love both the positive and the negative in history, what becomes of his sense of discrimination and selectivity when this imperative for slogging about in the darkest, most miserable moments of history for signs of spiritual progress reigns supreme? And because of the dialectical historian's preoccupation with recognizing himself in everything, doesn't he become incapable of separating himself from what is lowest within it, finding traces of himself "even in the profoundest depths of the sea, as living slime."[6] For our historian, *conscious recognition* should penetrate the depths of everything—everything must be suffered by spirit, and it follows that everything should in turn be taken up by the dialectical historian as yet another aspect of his representation of himself; that is, as an essential development in the painstaking movement by which he *discovers* himself.[7]

There are further dangers. If suffering is immediately taken to be both sacred and negative—that is, as an offense within nature that must be rectified—and the dialectical historian's most important task is that of confronting these negativities soberly in order to comprehend historical becoming, then what prevents him from being damaged and weakened by the weight of this painstaking project? Only the obstinacy of a metaphysical faith that becoming bends imperceptibly toward a good end galvanizes our historian against despair of the negative. This faith secures his resolve to continue confronting the endless procession of suffering as such, and it also secures his much-touted objectivity and judicious impartiality with regard to the for and against of things.

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[6] Nietzsche, F. (1997). *Untimely Meditations* (2nd ed.). (D. Breazeale, Ed., & R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 107

[7] Here we notice a similarity between Hegelian cosmology and the vagaries of modern scientific investigation. Like the universal historian, the 'pure scientist' indiscriminately measures, documents and represents the phenomena of nature. Without a *higher goal* that gives his investigations direction, he is content to probe aimlessly in the lowest, darkest corners of nature, simply in the name of a general imperative for growing the body of scientific knowledge.

But is this faith enough? In his book *Inner Experience,* Bataille speaks to this when he imagines seeing in a portrait of the aged Hegel, "exhaustion, from being in the depths of things, from being God."[8] What if this exhaustion is really the result of a life that has, because of the errors and inversions of dialectics and its historical sense, turned against itself? If it were possible to look upon the face of old Heraclitus, would we detect this same weariness? Undoubtedly suffering was just as real for the ancients as at is for us, the descendants of modernity—perhaps even more intensely so. But what if it is not suffering as such that diminishes life so much as the pervasiveness of *the apparition of suffering* that casts its shadow over everything, diminishing life's vitality and capacity for an action that would redeem it? We may compare this to the way in which the traumatized soldier's view of the world is forever obstructed by the haunting memory of the suffering he endured. Every moment of life after the damaging event appears to unfold in the shadow of the experience. Ultimately this shadow comes to be confused for the threat itself, and manifests itself as yet a further extension and repetition of the original injustice. Because dialectical consciousness carries its own discontent along with it wherever it goes, everything appears with an alloy of injustice.

3. Are We Moderns Freer?

What does the slave and the dialectician mean when he uses the word 'freedom?' From where does the value of their existence arise if not the "seriousness, painfulness, patience and labor of the negative"—that is, from a struggle for freedom *from* the master and from the disturbances and the traumas that he has caused?[9] What happens to the ideal once the last master recognizes the dignity of the last slave? And what would become of the dialectician himself if his labor were ever finally completed? From what would he derive the value of his existence and his value vis-à-vis other men? Would our newly liberated slave or his dialectizing benefactor be capable of *creating* a new value and a new meaning for existence, beyond that of the labor of the negative that hitherto gave it purpose and direction?

We spoke of the way that the negative insinuates itself into every positive order, as a shadow that persistently appears behind it that is always ready with a new rebuke. It

[8] Bataille, G. (2014). *Inner Experience.* (S. Kendall, Trans.) Albany, NY: SUNY Press. p. 111
[9] Hegel, G. W. (1931). *Phenomenology of Mind* (2nd Edition ed.). (J. B. Baillie, Trans.) London : G. Allen & Unwin. p. 81

would appear that this insinuation of the negative into every positive order obstructs the advancement of an unequivocally positive definition of the ideal by the dialectician. And while we know what the slave would like to have his freedom *from*, the question of what this newly won freedom might be *for* is one for which neither the dialectician nor the slave has an answer. Thus, the value of his life derives more from the struggle for the infinite ideal than any positive realization of the ideal itself, since every attempt to articulate the ideal casts the shadow of the reproving negative. In his short essay "Homer's Contest," Nietzsche articulates modern man's wretched condition by way of contrast with the ancient Greeks:

> Individuals in antiquity were freer, because their aims were nearer and easier to achieve. Modern man, on the other hand, is crossed everywhere by infinity, like swift-footed Achilles in the parable of Zeno of Elea, infinity impedes him, he cannot even overtake the tortoise.[10]

In Nietzsche's view, this excess of infinity is a *sickness*, and dialectics has made it immeasurably worse. Irrespective of the act to be accomplished or of the specific qualities of the master, dialectical rationality is always waiting with new misgivings, objections and reproaches for it.

4. The Dialectical Falsification of the Master

What is it about the master is really being reproached? If we bracket our interest in the normative ideal of freedom as Hegel understands it and offer a direct description of the active man, what is he if not the image of the man who enforces a worldly *arche* that is his own, the man who is strong and free precisely because he has cast off the labor of the negative and the burden of infinity? This is the image of a man of concrete hardness, a man around and in whom powerful forces gather and are embodied. He is the one who possesses strength of will to *create meaning* according to which strong forces are channeled and exert themselves over weaker forces, both in himself and in the world. He sets limits, enforces a regime of hygiene, and forbids any promiscuous mingling of forces that would result in their useless dissipation. Thus he prevents conflicting forces from exhausting themselves in petty dialectical confrontation and, sometimes subtly, sometimes violently, he directs these forces toward his own purposes, all without any

[10] "The Greek State" in *The Geneology of Morals*, 2008, p. 179

final appeal to rational justification. This of course does not *preclude* an appeal to rationality. Rather, it means only that reason is not the last arbiter in how his forces are organized. It is one among many instruments of the sovereign. Thus, as reason's ultimacy is rejected, so also is any rational imperative for reconciliation and universal synthesis.

Among the sovereigns we find "those law-giving and tyrannical spirits capable of tying fast the meaning of a concept, holding fast to it, men with that spiritual force of will who know how to turn the most fluid thing, the spirit, to stone for long periods and almost to eternalize it."[11] His subordination of rationality does not amount to a lack of concern with truth. On the contrary, we find in him the highest expression of a will to truth, which amounts to...

> a *making* fixed, a *making* true and lasting, a removing from sight of that false character, its reinterpretations into something that *is*. Truth is thus not something that's there and must be found out, discovered, but something *that must be made* and that provides the name for a *process* — or rather for a will to overcome, a will that left to itself has no end.[12]

This stands in stark contrast with the task of the dialectician as described by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, whose aim is "to sublimate fixed, determinate thoughts and thus to actualize the general and infuse it with spirit...*to make fixed thoughts fluid.*"[13] Whereas the "law-giver" by the force of his will arrests the flux of becoming and imposes order upon it, the dialectician dissolves this order and renders it back over to the fluidity of becoming.

When we are no longer blinded by the ideal we can see that the actual impact of the dialectic expresses itself not only in the slow depletion of the will and the blood of the active, sovereign man, but also in the active forces within the dialectician's own body. Doesn't 'justice for nature,' as the dialectician understands it, really mean imprisonment, deprivation and a slow death for the creative master? Rather than progressively reducing injustice, dialectics drives toward the substitution of the conditions for a vital, powerful life with a darkened and shifting shadow of itself. It is an impoverishment that follows from separating every emerging strong force from a domain within which it could be active and what it might do within it. The sovereign man—that strongest, fullest

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[11] Nietzsche, F. (2003). *The Late Notebooks.* (R. Bittner, Ed., & K. Sturge, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. section 34[88], p. 6

[12] *The Late Notebooks*, section 9[91], p. 155

[13] PS, Preface §33

expression of life, that sculptor for whom the rest are only clay who imposes a sense of meaning, direction and purpose—is reoriented toward his own shadow and becomes painfully encircled within it such that he can no longer find himself. He descends into depression, self-loathing, and the pathetic self-involvement of dialectical consciousness. This is the outcome of *a dialectical historicization of the sovereign will*—which is to say, the dissolving of every fixed sovereign order in the corrosive fluid of infinite rationality and its mode of temporalization. It amounts to a 'progressive' leveling out of every successive order, each of which is characterized more by an increasing lack of being, substance and purposiveness than by any genuine fullness of freedom and justice.

5. The Phantasm of Progress

But surely we must admit that Hegel's account is superior to that of Nietzsche's when we consider its explanatory power with regard to the movement of historical development. How else can we explain the apparent success that modern man has had in progressively rendering what is hostile and alien in nature over to the comforting balm of the concept, thereby diminishing by degrees the totality of nature's injustice and suffering? For instance, the advent of democracy has created the opportunity for the masses to select leaders who represent their own interests, rather than being subjected to heteronomous powers over which they haven't even the smallest measure of control. How account for the development of democratic institutions if not by recourse to the spiritual power of suffering to engender a conscious desire for progressively overcoming every positive order that depends upon exclusion and cruel forms of subjection? What becomes of the sense of *necessity* of this movement of history if we revert to a Nietzschean image of life? But still, we cannot be blamed for extending a suspicion for dialectical consciousness to any historical and historicizing sense that 'discovers' progress. If the explanatory power of Hegel's thought rests on its elegance with regard to this question of historical development, when this image of historical progress is rendered dubious as yet another phantasm of an afflicted or threatened body, the entire edifice falls into disrepair.

In Nietzsche's view, the historical sense that discovers orientation within becoming itself represents a further reaction of an individual against the chaos of his own changing conditions. Just as the Greeks gave birth to the Olympians because they

could not abide the unadulterated violence of Chronos, so also did the moderns attribute to temporal becoming a sense of purposiveness and justice as a reaction against its chaos, blind violence and overwhelming multiplicity. But this analogy extends only so far, since the cosmology of the Olympians affirms the essential necessity of cruelty and injustice for life, whereas dialectics circles relentlessly around the movement of its diminution. If cruelty and injustice are as essential to life as the Greeks would have it, then the apparent progress that spirit has made in reducing the suffering of existence follows more from a generalized diminishment and leveling out of life itself than any genuine alteration of it into something less hostile. The ideal of the progressive realization of justice could be nothing more than the wishful hallucination of a huddled multitude of sick and threatened creatures. And Hegelian idealism, as the most erudite articulation of this hallucination, may have gained its credibility and currency as a world philosophy not so much from its truth as from the way that the sickness has taken on the proportions of an epidemic. Hegelian thought cultivates our sense of 'injustice,' but this is really just the normativization of an anxious feeling that we are, in our weakness, threatened with destruction. This harbors the added danger of despair, and it explains the further effort to shield consciousness from the pervasiveness of 'injustice' with an optimistic appeal to faith in its own future.

6. Hope for the Unseen

We discover an exemplary articulation of the way in which this sense for justice and hope for the future piques in situations of weakness and vulnerability in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*.[14] Even in the margins of the Greek empire at its height we discover the first shoots of dialectical thinking attempting to force their way into the earth. When confronted with the prospect the Athenian invasion, Melian diplomats attempt to engage Athenian generals in the "exploration of ideas and arguments" regarding a just course of action that accounts for "the good of all." Rebuffing the Melians' effort to embroil them in rational arguments about justice, the Athenians respond, "You know and we know, as practical men, the question of justice arises only between parties equal in strength, and that the strong do what they can, and

[14] Thucydides. (1959). *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (Vol. Five). (C. F. Smith, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Book 5, p. 155 - 179

the weak submit." Upon realizing that the Athenians will not be taken in by any "obligation" to engage in considerations about the good of all, Melian diplomats then appeal to the "impartiality of fortune" with regard to disproportions in strength of numbers, claiming that "If we fight, there is still a *hope* that we shall stand secure...We trust that heaven will not allow us to be worsted by fortune, for in this quarrel we are right and you are wrong." But the strength of the Melians rests only upon deferred hopes—hopes that will lead them to be ruthlessly crushed by the superior power of the Athenians, who would ultimately execute every Melian man of military age and press the women and children into slavery. To avoid this outcome the Melians would have had to abide the tenet, put forth by the Athenians, that the most successful people are those who stand up to their equals, behave properly to their superiors, and treat their inferiors fairly. What prevented them from heeding this sober imperative? That they would "regard the future as more certain than the present, and to allow hope to convert the unseen into reality."

How do the lessons of the Athenians stand when we view them through the lens of the dialectician's historical sense? As long as the ideal remains intact, consciousness will be miserably stretched between this ideal and the body that moves in its shadow. This shadow represents the 'margin of error' within which the concrete order of things is always inverted, falsified and de-substantialized. Not only is it within this margin that one's current situation will be evaluated and judged, but the past will always be taken up within it as well. This is because what this margin really measures is *the time between the lost ideal and a present state of fallenness from this ideal.* Everything that happens in between is trapped in the shadow of the valley of the negative, as a moment that leads fatefully toward a future recovery of itself in the ideal. As long as one remains in the margin, one is inescapably caught in temporal becoming, and prevented from making the ascent from becoming into being—which is to say, one is consigned only to *reacting* against circumstances that forever reflect the absence of the ideal, and one is in this way prevented from *acting*. As a mode of the consciousness that hangs as on a cross between the ideal and the immediate body, the historical sense of the dialectician not only prevents one from acting but it also precludes recognizing a genuine act of the past for what it is.

Consciousness in this mode of the historical sense accomplishes this because it mystifies, flattens out and glosses over the site of the genuine act; namely, *the body itself.*

It induces man to give himself to "the hope for the unseen," and to judge and measure everything according to this hope, rather than confronting the concrete bodily pressures and restraints of active forces. And just as the body itself is mystified, so also the forces that cross over and through it are never soberly evaluated—that is, evaluated as *strong or weak, noble or base*. In this way, the body is forever prevented from realizing itself as anything more than a moment of the suffering negative. What's more, as the image of the slow rectification of the 'injustices' perpetrated by the sovereign unfolds, what ensues is a *globalized* inhibition and censoring of every attempt at such a sober evaluation of strength and weakness, an evaluation that can only unfold beyond any dialectical imperative of justice, since the ascendancy of the latter is really just a sign of reactivity and symptom of weakness. It is in this same way that the historical sense actually falsifies the critical lesson of the Athenians, transforming the foolish destruction of the Melians into an early victory for spirit, if only because for the universal historian their act of defiance displays a superior sense of the good and, as such, they are held to have "looked the negative in the face" and recognized what was really at stake in their confrontation with a superior power; namely, the supreme import of an uncompromising demand for justice and freedom from oppression. (PS, Preface §32) In this way, the Melians chose death over a life of 'injustice' and subjection.

7. The Dialectical Interiorization of the Struggle against Domination

The progressive rise of dialectical rationality in history corresponded with the disappearance of the social institutions of slave trade. But this disappearance does not imply that slavery has become extinct, only that the battle against 'irrational' forms of domination now largely plays itself out *within the individual*. We may hide scenes of domination from our outward view, but "inescapable powers remain law and restraint to the individual."[15] Thus if modern man finds himself less and less within a breach that manifests itself as a struggle between a remote ideal and an openly suffering external world, it is not because slavery has been overcome but that man has *internalized* the breach. The negativity of consciousness within him always undermines, assails and sequesters every dominating, active force, whether within himself or abroad. Now, man is so pathetically divided against himself that he can hardly outrun the turtle. Thus

[15] "The Greek State" in *The Geneology of Morals*, 2008, p. 167

modern man is enfeebled less by that never-ending labor of the negative that manifests itself historically in the wider world vis-à-vis other men than by the way in which *the body itself has become the primary site of this breach*—this insofar as there are immediate forces within the body itself that remain intransigent, and refuse to submit themselves to this labor and its mode of temporalization.

This means that there are forces within the individual body that are unrelenting in their resistance to dialectical sublation and historicization. At the level of the individual, the obstinacy of these unruly forces signifies a residual tension between the individual's immediate bodily 'in-itself' and the mediated 'for-itself' of a consciousness that has succeeded in the rational sublimation of other forces of the individual's body to itself. That this tension should be progressively restricted to the *inner-life* of the individual rather than instantiating itself as a concretely conditioned *external* relation between the real flesh and blood slave and the real flesh and blood master is held to be a sure sign of progress for spirit by the dialectician. With this internalization of the breach there corresponds the internalization both of the ideal and the material conditions against which the ideal struggles, such that it no longer represents a goal to be realized between men, but one that instead plays itself out between the individual subject and his body alone.

8. Nietzsche's Rejection of the Sign of Suffering

From this discussion it should be clear that, for Hegel, suffering is ultimately a matter of the separation of the immediate body from the absolute, with consciousness unhappily inhabiting the breach between them. It is explained by the way in which spirit has lost itself in this breach between the abstract immediacy and alterity of the body on the one hand, and the ideal on the other. The advance of the concept through which the subject overcomes alienation and unifies with itself generates the enjoyment of a victory over suffering. Clearly this vaguely Cartesian opposition between the infinite and the finite, between thought and the immediate body, is not sufficient as an account of the origin of suffering. Could it be that it is not the lack of unity with itself that makes it suffer so much as *too much unity with itself* under the sacred sign of suffering?

Here we approach another point of convergence of several uniquely Nietzschean concerns: reactivity against suffering, slavish gregariousness, and

representation. All of these concerns appear to congregate around what, from Nietzsche's perspective, mark the essential lacunae of Hegel's thought—a lacunae that can be formulated along Nietzschean lines in the following way: *why interpret suffering as the sign of a deficiency or a lack within existence*? Hegel takes it for granted that alienation and suffering are the most urgent of problems, and that the demand for its reduction drives history toward a final synthesis. Even his interpretation of why the master insists on his own finite mediation of the present exhibits this inability to imagine that one could be motivated by something other than relief from displeasure. He argues that what inhibits progress toward this ultimate synthesis is chiefly the master's affective captivation with the *satisfactions* accorded to him by participating in the prevailing order. As we saw in the previous chapter, these satisfactions maintain the master's investment in this order—at once they assure his continued insistence upon the banal repetitions of habitual and administrative activities that extend its day-to-day existence and also his willingness to perform the occasional demonstrations of violence necessary to sustain it. But when we look a bit more closely, we can see that Hegel has fashioned his master as an inversion of the image of the slave, unwittingly projecting into the former the deepest "unmediated" desires of the latter; namely, those of satisfaction, happiness and freedom from lack and deprivation. To be sure, many of those who are taken to be masters are chiefly interested in hedonistic satisfaction. These men take advantage of their position of privilege in order to maintain themselves in comfort and to satisfy their basest impulses. It is just this drive to satisfy themselves that made them seek positions of privilege to begin with.

This irrepressible urgency for gratification is indeed a common feature of those who enjoy positions of privilege within the establishment—the very same that Hegel regards as masters. But surely this cannot be what it means to be a genuine master. If this is so, then the only thing that would separate the master from the swaddled infant is that the former knows how to avail himself of elaborate institutional and social means to satisfy himself. One is helpless, and one has means, but both are ultimately interested in *relief*. The true master could not be more different from this image. Nietzsche says it best:

> Brave and creative men never see pleasure and suffering as ultimate questions of value — they are accompanying states, one must want both if one wants to achieve anything. Something weary and sick in the metaphysicians and religious men is expressed in their foregrounding problems of pleasure and suffering. Morality, too, only has such

> importance for them because it is considered an essential condition for the abolition of suffering.[16]

Hegel's image of the master can be readily contrasted with Nietzsche's *creative master* who never foregrounds the problem of suffering. Because the creative master holds the task of realizing his image of life to be important above all else, he exercises a pitiless severity with regard to what is weakest in himself and in others, all with a view toward a goal that is his entirely his own. As such, he refuses to allow any aspect of his affective life to be subsumed under the sign of the suffering negative, and in this way he prevents these passions from arraying together alongside others against what is best and strongest within himself under this sign. In short, he denies *representation* to what is weakest and most reactive within himself in order to defend what is exceptional, thereby giving it the distance from the others that is necessary for it to do what it can do.

But this does not mean that the creative master accords to his own affective life less importance. On the contrary, far from placing it tidily under the general or 'universal' sign of suffering, he *honors* his affective life more genuinely by *abiding* the chaotic battle of its multiplicity long enough to create concepts that are unique to what is strongest within it. By synthesizing these multiplicities into new organs of power, the master's concept serves to redouble and enhance their respective forces. To be more precise, the concept abets in the elevation of superior forces to the status of an organized power, but at the same time, the master's concept is itself the product of a genetic process according to which the strongest forces have been *allowed* to distinguish themselves from those that are weaker without interference from representations derived from the existing tablet of values. Through this playful process of disenchantment, dissolution and forceful consolidation, the affective multitude is now *compelled* to serve under the banner of his concept, or be banished to the margins. And because the creation of the master's concept was undertaken while disallowing contamination from the sign of the suffering negative, those that are forcefully assimilated to this concept are given a purpose and a goal that is unalloyed with negativity and is thus radically affirmative. This stands in contrast to the dialectical concept that is forged from the labor of the negative—a concept that forever begins as a *reaction* against suffering, unhappiness and a lack of freedom.

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[16] *The Late Notebooks*, 2003, p. 142

9. Being, Becoming and the Subject

Whether we speak of the slave or the master, both are driven ultimately by a *will to power*. The highest expression of this will to power is the "imprinting upon becoming the character of being"—an imprinting that, at least for man, unfolds under the aegis of the concept.[17] What distinguishes the concepts of the master from those of the slave is that the master's concepts are the outcome of an original movement from becoming to being that is *uninterrupted by negativity*. The slave's concepts are derivative because they arise out of the negative as a reaction against the *disturbances* and *too-muchness* of becoming and change. Because the slave cannot endure the chaos of affective multiplicity, he clutches desperately for the modicum of stability, identity and being that he finds in the metaphysical beliefs in his inherent dignity, his hope for the unseen and a future for himself in which justice will be realized. But, as Nietzsche says, "a belief's strength alone guarantees nothing whatsoever about its truth."[18] More than anything else, these kinds of beliefs reveal how little becoming one can endure. To the degree that these beliefs concern one's supposed essential being, we can say that their strength is inversely proportional to the creative impotence and weakness of the one who adheres to it. They are precisely attempts to *compensate* for one's own impotence with regard to actively, creatively realizing the substance of these beliefs.

Nonetheless, the slave would like for us to accept that his beliefs represent his true nature. As such, they signify an effort to draw a boundary between the deep, unrealized essence of what he is and the worldly realities that are merely accidental to his being. On this basis it is also supposed that we can distinguish between those acts that he intends (and what he intends of them), and those acts that are 'unjustly' compelled by the forces that threaten him. The slave's belief aims at *representing* this ideal borderline between what he is and what he is not, what is properly his own and what is not, both at the level of his ultimate value and also that of the intention of his acts. On one side of this borderline we are supposed to discover the immobile locus of value within the world; namely, *the soul* or *subject,* whose value derives from its privileged relationship to the good and the absolute. On the other side we discover

[17] *The Late Notebooks*, 2003, section 7[54], p. 138
[18] *The Late Notebooks*, 2003, section 4[8], p. 104

the hostile, friendly or indifferent beings that populate the world of this subject. Each of these beings possesses a relative value, whether negative or positive, that ultimately derives from the superior value of the subject itself and, by inference, the ultimate value of the absolute. Therefore the borderline that the belief represents is thought to divide *the realm of beings*. While some of these beings carry in their hearts the values of the absolute and others have sacrificed these values in view of their own selfish satisfaction, what is common to them all is that they are believed *to be*, *to exist as this or that*, and as such they possess a value that can be determined according to their respective relationships to the ultimate truth of the absolute. In this sense, one's value is always already established, and this renders the movement of its creation unnecessary. Really, the only reason to undertake the effort to actualize this inherent value is so that one can live it out in the world rather than carrying it like a secret deep within oneself.

Whereas the slave would have us accept that these beliefs represent the truest values, it is by means of the illusion upon which these beliefs are based that value is conferred. Nietzsche's notes:

> From the values attributed to *what is* derives the condemnation with what *becomes*: such a world of being having been invented in the first place.
>
> 'What is' as illusion; reversal of values: the illusion is what conferred value—
>
> Knowledge as such is impossible within becoming; so how is knowledge possible? As error about itself, as will to power, as will to deception.[19]

The slave erroneously takes himself to be a being that is. He believes that he *discovers* value in his being, and he derives his reproaches for whatever threatens to press him into service from this uncritical self-valuation. It is as if there exists deep within him a sensitive, inscrutable core of value that should be *protected* from all thoughtful evaluation—an immobile locus of 'dignity' and 'respectability' hidden deep within, which only God can confer. Whatever changes may occur at the level of his external condition, he holds that this deep value remains unchanged, and it is this that provides him with the basis to judge and condemn externalities that do injustice to his inherent value.

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[19] *The Late Notebooks*, 2003, section 7[54], p. 138

The above is perfectly exemplified in the Christian 'Right to Life' movement in the United States. The anti-abortion activist clings to his belief in the 'sanctity of life,' and he holds abortion to be a terrible sin. For him, the unborn child represents this inscrutable core of value of the soul. Given the activist's lack of concern for the child once it has entered the world (which is evident in the former's indifference to poverty and despair), we can even surmise that for him the unborn fetus is *more* valuable precisely because it has yet to emerge into the world. This is, after all, a fallen, evil world that will inevitably corrupt the child with impurities. In short, the fetus signifies the deepest, uncorrupted value and meaning of the human being—a value that not only endures independent of one's actions, but is even *sullied* by the efforts that the fallen world will inevitably demand of it once it has been born. The activist has projected his own attitudes toward himself into his struggles against abortion. Because he hates what the world has done to him and resents the world for doing it, he holds to the fiction of his own essential being and value even more tenaciously.

But this involves an inversion and a 'reversal of values.' The movement from becoming to being which originally *created* value is hidden, and one takes these values to have existed *prior* to this movement. *The inversion places the essential being first*, and it makes of becoming a subordinate movement by which the pre-existing being, with its ready-made essential value, either recovers or is deprived of itself. In this way the inversion amounts to a (self-)deception: it hides that *absolutely everything undergoes the movement of becoming*—one's depths are no exception. And if this is the case, then the effort to carve an inscrutable core of value out of becoming implies a fear either that nothing of worth can be made from what moves there (nihilism), or that one lacks the strength, vision and determination to undertake the painstaking process of making it (infirmity, weakness). Indeed the first might follow from the second.

Whether the slave has forgotten that his being is an invention and not an endowment, or whether he simply ignores it, this is an open question for us. It should not surprise us if the former were the case, that he has forgotten or repressed the movement of invention. Tracing it back genealogically, the movement of invention descends toward the affective chaos of becoming out of which his being was originally fashioned as reaction. It recedes in the direction of the unspeakable dissolution and destruction of the subject, and as such it marks a limit that he dare not cross. But a lack of courage is not the only thing that prevents him from crossing over toward the

chaos of becoming. The slave's invention of 'what is' originally unfolded as a reaction against powerful forces of compulsion within becoming. His reactivity arises because he is simply not strong enough to endure the creative passions without perishing from them, whether literally or in madness.

6

Nietzsche's Supreme Phantasm

You can tie me up if you wish,
But there is nothing more useless than an organ.

—Antonin Artaud, 1947

Nietzsche's deepest confrontation with vital forces would come about through a disturbance in his organism. Beleaguered by excruciating headaches, his later years found him struggling to accept a life of relentless suffering. Because his work had until then been an effort to give voice to the diabolical forces of the body that conditioned thought, to now turn away from this host of increasingly hostile forces would have been a betrayal of his sovereign impulse. Not that such a betrayal would be uncommon. For instance, the young poet who wrote *The Hollow Men* and *The Wasteland*—those sober modernist testaments to the vacuity of modern culture and the self-delusion of religion—is but one example of someone who, later in life, would validate his own claim that "humankind cannot stand very much reality" and turn against the profound and terrifying insights of his younger days. Given over to a fancy that often goes together with decline, T.S. Eliot would ultimately become a Christian and "give his life" to God. By contrast, Nietzsche found in his debilitating illness yet another opportunity for self-overcoming. Instead of flying from these seemingly alien forces that exerted themselves on his organism and threatened his consciousness, he would give himself to them willingly, even though this would only accelerate the advance of a palsy that would drive him to madness, and finally kill him.

In this image of a languishing, yet relentlessly affirmative Nietzsche, Pierre Klossowski finds not an image of decline, but of *the culmination of a life of genuine*

power. The book *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle,*[1] where Klossowski expounds upon this image, is relatively untouched by English readers. This is somewhat puzzling, given that Foucault said that it was the most profound book he had ever read, "on a par with Nietzsche himself." One finds in Deleuze's later works a number of explicit references to Klossowski and even more allusions to his thought, specifically in *Anti-Oedipus* where the figure of Klossowski casts a long shadow. Deleuze's concept of the 'schizophrenic body' is an appropriation of aspects of Klossowski's thought on Nietzsche, and his notion of the 'body without organs' is a synthesis of the thought of Klossowski and Artaud. But aside from the fact that there was no English translation of the book until 1997, the book's relative obscurity is due in no small part to its difficulty. It is also important to acknowledge how entirely terrifying its truths are, and how unready most of us are to hear them. Any authentic text written on the philosophy of Nietzsche must summon the same forces that move in his thought. Because I believe that Klossowski's text accomplishes this, we will treat it almost as if Nietzsche himself wrote it. If it strikes the reader of this book that there are no discernable differences between the positions of Klossowski and Nietzsche, this is because the former adopts no critical removal or reflective distance. He is vitally concerned with the same questions as Nietzsche and finds great powers hidden in his answers. He had no interest in *criticizing* Nietzsche – still less was he interested in *defending* him. For more than a century Nietzsche's thought withstood the attacks of those who feared that letting this philosophy go unopposed would result in a wildfire of nihilism. It endured the same from others who were inured to the warm comforts of institutions, and for whom, as we'll discuss in a moment, this philosophy represents a grave and constant threat. If Nietzsche's philosophy could withstand the relentless attacks in his brain, if it could endure the primordial forces that surged in his own sick body, then surely it can hold out against the reactionary polemics of pale intellectuals and frightened moralists.

[1] Klossowski, P. (1997). *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle.* (D. W. Smith, Trans.) London: Continuum.

1. The Reactive Forces of Consciousness and The Active Forces of the Body

How shall we understand these attacks on Nietzsche's organism? If these attacks are left unaccounted for within the movement of his philosophy, how genuine could such a philosophy be? Klossowski says, "Everything the body says—its well-being and its diseases—gives us the best information about our destiny. Nietzsche wanted to go back toward what, in himself, was most distant in order to comprehend what is most immediate."[2] What is it that is most immediate? Consciousness and the physical self are the immediate element in which the ego dwells. When you become unwell, don't you experience this as a sort of *invasion* of your physical self by an alien power, which then in turn undermines and destabilizes your consciousness? But how do you come to make this distinction between *what is your own* and *what is alien* in the body?

In order to answer this question, it will be instructive first to look at the relation between the body and thought in the absence of such an 'alien presence.' In our normal, 'healthy' comportment, the body appears to function according to the ends and purposes assigned to it by consciousness. When healthy, I can make progress toward my goals and fulfill my institutional responsibilities. The body is a mere instrument in the accomplishment of these goals and, as long as it functions properly in this instrumental complex, it goes more or less unnoticed. By analogy, we can think of the way in which, for the master machinist, his tools function as prostheses. He wields them as if they were parts of his body. When the tool breaks, so too does the rhythm and rapport of the machinist's work. Just like the tools of the master craftsman, I forget my body until it fails to fulfill the functional directives under which I have placed it.

But if it is the case that I effectively forget my body when it functions properly, does this mean that a condition for truly remembering it is its failure? If so, what can I be said to remember about it? Only that it can deviate from the directives under which my consciousness has placed it. As we get older, we learn to take better care of our bodies in order that it will be ready to respond to our commands. Whatever has been learned from the ailment, it does not seem to tell us anything about the *body as such*; only about our need for it to remain strong and healthy so that we can press it into the service of our purposes and goals. At best, we've discovered that our bodies are fragile

[2] Klossowski, 1997, p. 23

and that we depend upon them for the advancement of these purposes. When the tool breaks, the craftsman concerns himself only with either fixing or replacing it so that he can continue with his efforts. In the future, he might use a bit more care with the tool, but only to avoid the inconvenience of having to replace or repair it – certainly not because he cares about it in itself. Like the craftsman's relationship with the tool, our relationship with our bodies remains oriented by the ends that we assign to it in consciousness. Thus, this invading force of illness that has assumed control of my body is defined as 'other' or 'alien' only insofar as *it does not accord with my image of what the body should be*. What emerges is an *opposition* between the forces that occasionally take over the body and a consciousness that instrumentalizes this body in view of its own ends; between the forces of the *body as such* and a consciousness that, whether explicitly or not, thinks of the body as something over which it has a sovereign right. But if we want to side with the powerful and genuine forces of life, which side of this opposition should we embrace?

Nietzsche's earlier work had taught him to be suspicious of this opposition between the spiritual forces of consciousness and the somatic forces of the body. He saw in it the mark of a mistake in becoming that apparently inverts the natural order of things – a mistake that makes it possible for the weak to dominate the strong. A moment ago we said that consciousness interprets illness as a kind of interruption of the advancement of its projects and goals, and thus as a contingent moment in the development of spiritual purposes that transcend the body. If consciousness always considers the body only in terms of whether it functions for its spiritualized ends, it would seem that consciousness would be incapable of knowing anything about the *body as such*. Such 'knowledge' of the body could only refer back to the standards that consciousness has imposed on it. In light of Nietzsche's suspicions concerning the inversion of the weak and the strong, couldn't it also be the case that consciousness lacks the capacity to distinguish an *actual* sickness from a *surge of powerful forces* in the body as such? Consciousness' interpretation of what seems to it an invading power is entirely shaped by the way in which it destabilizes its efforts to realize its spiritualized ends. It makes the distinction between what is its own and what is other purely on this basis. Thus all of the pathologies of the body are defined by way of their oppositions to the purposes of consciousness, which has the implication that what we call "pathological" is always a function of interpretation.

2. Functionality and the Brain

From the preceding, we can see that Nietzsche's interest was not with abandoning himself to morbidity, but rather, more broadly, with the struggle between the reactive forces of consciousness and the active forces of the body. Furthermore, we've discovered that not only is consciousness unable to consider the body as such, but, accordingly, it lacks the capacity for distinguishing between sickness and a surge of powerful forces – both are something that beset it. But how does this obfuscation unfold *within the organism itself*? And, more importantly, why does the organism produce consciousness if it only serves to obscure the true nature of the forces of the body? Extrapolating from Nietzsche's later writings, Klossowski suggests that the frontline of the battle between somatic and spiritual forces is precisely *the brain itself*. Klossowski remarks:

> There seems to be a strict correlation between the phenomenon of pain, which is experienced by the organism as the aggression of an invading external power, and the biological process that leads to the formation of the brain. The brain, which concentrates all the reflexes on fighting the aggression, is able to represent the inflicted pain as degrees of excitations oscillating between pain and pleasure. The brain can have representation only if it meticulously spiritualizes the elementary excitations into the danger of pain or the good fortune of pleasure.[3]

By concentrating the reflexes on fighting the aggression, the brain manages the body's functionality, and, as we said, this movement of the imposition of a function on the body corresponds with the emergence of the rift between what is 'alien' within it and what is not. Because the sensation of illness or pain is immediately interpreted by the brain as a warning that the body is tending to defy the functional directives under which consciousness has placed it, the brain appears to be constitutionally incapable of reckoning that this defiance could be an expression of something that is trying to make itself heard that is *superior* to these directives. After all, its role is one of *filtering* the powers of the body that cannot be assimilated to consciousness' spiritualized ends. This means that, even before these forces could possibly reveal themselves to consciousness such that the latter might be able to align itself with them, they have been interpreted by the brain as hostile. In other words, the brain's role within the organism is one of imposing a *functional equilibrium and stability* on the body. But what if the

[3] Klossowski, 1997, p. 25

body has its own 'intelligence' and its own 'language' to transmit this intelligence? The brain has already rendered consciousness deaf to this language, and thus is it forever oblivious to the genuine order of impulsive movement that determines the body as such.

Now that these forces of the body have been filtered, consciousness can constitute a *code of signs* to represent only what was *weak* enough to have passed through the cerebral filter; that is, for those impulses which exhibit little or no resistance to the movement of representation within this code of signs. Through this process, Klossowski remarks, "The body, insofar as it is grasped by consciousness, *dissociates* itself from the impulses that flow through it, and which, having come together fortuitously, continue to sustain the body in an equally fortuitous manner...The body adopts only those reflexes that allow it to maintain itself for the cerebral activity, just as the latter henceforth adopts the body as its own product."[4] This explains not only how the 'body' comes to be represented as the *property* of a 'person', but also how it becomes an *automatism*, a mere instrument of consciousness. Furthermore, this helps us to understand the growing detachment of this 'person,' who understands himself entirely through this code of everyday signs, from the body as such. Because the movement of representation is not a total sublation of intensive forces, the afflux and reflux of these forces continue on their own in spite of their partial subsumption under a code of signs, if in a somewhat diminished form. Only the *weakest quantities of the body's intensities* are fit for admittance into the cerebral citadel. The remainder "overflows the fixity of signs and continues on in their intervals" – that is, in the awkward silences that interrupt the linkage of signs.[5] In these gaps of silence where our representations fall short, the body is allowed to be fundamentally what it is; namely, "the prolonged extremity of chaos," a "product of chance," a "fortuitous cohesion of contradictory impulses."[6] Regardless of the cerebral inversion, the body is and will always be the battleground of a combat of impulsive movements. The brain simply *shields* consciousness from the better part of this combat through the process of filtration of those impulses that oppose the image of meaning that consciousness has produced for itself.

[4] Klossowski, 1997, p. 27
[5] Klossowski, 1997, p. 3
[6] Klossowski, 1997, p. 33, 26, 28

3. The Body as Genuine Self

Illness marks a moment when the body overpowers the brain and the fortuitous cohesion of forces upon which consciousness depends is threatened. If only temporarily, the conscious person, his image of meaning, and the code of signs that lends them support – all so many products of the cerebral inversion – are put in abeyance. *Nietzsche saw in this suspension of the phantasms of consciousness an opportunity to reconstitute the self authentically.* Klossowski remarks:

> Everything that the brain had refused him lay hidden in his corporeal life. All evil and suffering are the result of a quarrel between the body's multiplicity, with its millions of vague impulses, and the interpretive stubbornness of the meaning bestowed on it by the brain. *It is from the body, from the [genuine] self, that every creative force and every evaluation arises.* And it is from their cerebral inversion that mortal specters are born, starting with a voluntary ego, a mind 'deprived of itself (my emphasis).'[7]

But once the body ceases to resist the cerebral inversion, these vague impulses are once again 'put in their place' and we are hasty to return to our institutional responsibilities and engagements with others. But what about this haste? Is it not the mark of our avoidance of the painful effort of an *authentic* reconstitution of the self?

And what about these others? Among the "mortal specters" of the cerebral inversion of which Klossowski speaks are not only the 'person' and the 'voluntary ego,' but also the *other person.* Nietzsche himself remarks:

> What then is our neighbor? Something within us, some modification of ourselves that have become conscious: an image, this is what our neighbor is. Our self of which we are conscious: is it not an image as well, something outside of us, something external, on the outside? We never touch anything but an image, and not ourselves, not our Self. Are we not strangers to ourselves and also as close to ourselves as to our neighbor?[8]

The *you* has no more reality than the *me*, except as a "modification of the Self." What is this modification, if not precisely the cerebral inversion? And just as my own conscious person depends for its integrity and meaningful unity on the image and the code of signs that gives this image support, so too does that of the other person. Once the image, with its corresponding code of signs, is redeployed within the convalesced

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[7] Klossowski, 1997, p. 32

[8] Nietzsche, F. (n.d.). *www.nietzschesource.org*. Retrieved May 1, 2013, from Nietzsche Source: http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF1883, 1883, Summer, section 12[40]

body, the agent can then speak 'intelligibly' about his experience when he was ill, if only *negatively* in terms of the way that it *disallowed* him from meeting his responsibilities. But this redeployment also marks the moment that a *chattering social self* resumes his apparent sovereignty in the body, which corresponds to the concealment of the silent movement of intensive forces. Because this social self is anxious to avoid the palpable silences in which the impulsive movements exert their pressures, he enlists others to help him to sustain the images that lend meaning and purpose to his life. Again, these images are the product of a movement according to which they have been stripped of anything that resembles the impulsive forces that originally condition thought. As soon as I identify with them, I have already submitted to the unequal exchange of my genuine self for the social, public self. To the degree that I 'understand' myself in this way – that is, through these images that circulate in culture – I am fundamentally impotent to either authentically evaluate or create *because I am not my self*. How, then, do I overcome this creative powerlessness? I must find a means by which not only to speak, but also to *genuinely affirm* what took hold of me when I was 'unwell.'

4. Good Intentions and Institutional Goals

I would like to add just a few closing remarks about institutions to suggest a direction for further discussion. From the preceding, it should be clear enough that a necessary physiological condition for inscription into an institutional framework – whether a mere societal practice or an established organization – is precisely this cerebral inversion which we have just tried to describe. As such, only the weakest, most domesticated of the impulses are transformed into 'good intentions' and work in the service of institutional goals. The brain already filters out the most powerful forces, which are, in themselves, neither good nor evil. Now, what unfolded originally at the level of *physiology* replicates and hypostasizes at the level of the *social*.

But there is something else at work here, something that is unique to the social phenomenon of institutions; *they enforce a regime of inversion.* In this strict regime of inversion, weak forces are *enjoined* with other weak forces in view of collectively holding out against those active forces of the body that are powerful enough to thwart the inversion. More than this, the regime functions to *cut down* the rare cases of authentic creative force, to *an-nihil-ate and immobilize* them before they can become a threat. They gather together and, in the name of their 'lofty' values and purposes, array

against the rare manifestations of overt powerful forces. Of course, the genuinely creative self cannot be pressed into the service of a purpose or a cause, whether institutional or otherwise. It will not try to represent its powers according to established values; still less will it try to increase them through the harmonization with others' interests or goals. Indeed, from the moment at which its powers submit to association and representation according to the established code of signs, everything genuinely valuable is lost because the inversion has already happened, and weak forces have prevailed.

BERGSON

7

The Ambiguity of Sensation

Only through what Bergson calls 'intuition' can one sympathize with the primordial becoming of life, which he characterizes in terms of duration. Fundamentally, duration is nothing more than the endless flow of qualitative multiplicity, and can be understood by analogy to the unfolding of a song, in which the past notes melt organically into the present, which in turn gives way to and suggests those that are yet to come. There are no distinct moments in duration, only the synthetic flow of the past toward the future; the present instant being merely an abstraction of the intelligence that marks the limit between the two. Out of and within the raw fabric of immediate data, the individual consciousness erects physiological mechanisms and habits within the organism in order to create the best conditions for its adaptation to the environment. And while these habits are entirely necessary and useful for the successful adaptation of the organism to this environment, they can become obstacles to intuiting the durational flow that is at the core of reality. This tendency to decimate duration results in the formation of our representations, which are really nothing more than hypostatizations of our habitual, useful comportments vis-à-vis the forms of the external world. When human being's natural bent of mind toward utility goes unchecked and we are unwilling to attempt to value the useless, the representations and concepts that emerge will further diminish the vitality and creativity of our organism, thereby weighing it down in inertia. [1]

[1] The English and French editions of Bergson's texts are cited alongside one another, with the page number for the English translation in the first position and the original French following it; e.g. (*Time and Free Will*, p. English/French). I have made use of the following editions throughout:
Bergson, H. (2001). *Time and Free Will.* (F. Pogson, Trans.) Mineola: Dover Publications.

But precisely how does this inertia express itself in terms of sensation? In Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, the answer to this question has to do with to the way that our sensations are spatialized, and speciously situated by the understanding in the causal network that is the material world. Bergson says that when sensations are understood correctly, we find that they do not occupy space, are not quantifiable or divisible, but rather exhibit the unextended qualitative multiplicity of duration. When purified of the forms borrowed from the external world, we find that they are nothing more than "simple states," "intermediate between superficial efforts and deep-seated feelings."[2] Being nestled in this intermediate position comes with a price; namely, that sensations become ambiguous; sometimes functioning as useful signs of reality, sometimes exhibiting reality itself. In order to determine this difference, Bergson says that we must set "ourselves the...problem of ask[ing] whether the most obvious states of the ego itself, which we believe that we grasp directly in intuition, are not mostly perceived through the medium of certain forms borrowed from the external world."[3] As mere signs, not only are these forms at a remove from reality, but they also loose the dynamism and creative force that issues from it. The intelligence is at least in part responsible for this loss of dynamism because of the way that it introduces the forms of the external world into sensations, *including its very externality*. Thus, Bergson sets himself the task of driving this externality out in the name of the unextendedness of sensation. The advance of the forms of the external world marks a real encroachment upon the proper field of duration. This encroachment of the forms of the external world upon simple, unextended states has the impact that consciousness becomes alienated from sensation in its nakedness and purity of qualitative multiplicity. This results through a process in which this multiplicity becomes more deeply buried under representations. Furthermore, the organism, formerly dynamized by its intimacy with duration, stiffens and congeals into a routinized engagement with its surrounding environment.

—(1991). *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France
—(1991). *Matter and Memory.* (W. P. N.M. Paul, Trans.) New York: Zone Books.
—(1990). *Matière et mémoire.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
—(2005). *Creative Evolution.* (A. Mitchell, Trans.) New York City: Barnes and Noble Books.
—(2007). *L'Evolution créatrice.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
[2] *Time and Free Will*, p. 31/23, 27/20
[3] *Time and Free Will*, p. 223/168

In *Time and Free Will,* it is clear that Bergson understands sensation to be the frontline of this encroachment of the forms of the external world upon duration. With his method of intuition, he attempts to liberate the dynamic powers of consciousness from this incursion. But, like many who find themselves firmly on one side or another of a battle line, the attacks on the enemy can become polemical and reactionary. The driving question of this chapter will be this: In his attempt to reclaim sensation for duration by driving extensity from it, hasn't he gone too far, effectively alienating man from his own suffering body? It seems that in the maturation of his thought Bergson realized just this: in *Matter and Memory* he gives ground by conceding that sensation is "vaguely" extended.[4] His task shifts from purifying sensation of the intrusion of extensity, to showing that, like concrete perception, sensation is an alloy of both matter and duration.

The broader goal of this chapter is to trace the development of Bergson's concept of sensation between these two books, paying especially close attention to the specific sensation of pain. We will discover that indeed this concept is improved from the early work of *Time and Free Will* to the later work *Matter and Memory*, if only because he concedes that sensation is genuinely alloyed with something that is not immediately subject to the synthesis of durational consciousness. He thus restores a certain externality to sensation, which, as we will see, is necessary to account for that sort of excruciating pain that expresses itself as an external aggression. By way of conclusion, we will suggest that what escapes this synthesis cannot be reduced to something inert; that there are forces at work in the body as such that are independent of individual consciousness and memory as he understands it.

Among the main goals of *Time and Free Will* is the repudiation of the 'common sense' assumption that intensive states are inherently quantitative, and can thus be assimilated to magnitudes. This is the principle mistake of psychophysics, which, he argues,

> is condemned to revolve in a vicious circle, for the theoretical postulate upon which it rests condemns it to experimental verification, and it cannot be experimentally verified unless its postulate is first granted. The fact is that there is no point of contact between the unextended and the extended, between quality and quantity. We can interpret the one by the other, set up the one as the equivalent of the other; but sooner or

[4] *Matter and Memory,* p. 53/53

> later, at the beginning or at the end, we shall have to recognize the conventional character of this assimilation.[5]

If in our intensive states we find measurable or comparable intensities, this is because we have assumed, *petitio principii*, the intensive to be of the same nature as the extensive. Bergson tells us that if both are understood by common sense to be measurable or comparable, then both are presumed to be extended, however miniscule or "compressed" this extension might be. And it is in this mistaken way in which our intensive states are understood to unfold in a compressed space that we find the original conditions of our representations. That is, he argues that it is this effacement of their fundamentally qualitative, and thus unextended, nature that makes it possible for us to *speak intelligibly* about these intensive states:

> As speech dominates over thought, as external objects, which are common to us all, are more important to us than the subjective states through which each of us passes, we have everything to gain by objectifying these states, by introducing into them, to the largest possible extent, the representation of their external cause. And the more our knowledge increases, the more we perceive the extensive behind the intensive, quantity behind quality, the more also we tend to thrust the former into the latter, and to treat our sensations as magnitudes.[6]

If we understand intensive states in terms of extensive magnitudes it is, in Bergson's view, because we "define the intensity of a sensation, or of any state whatever of the ego, by the number and magnitude of the objective, and therefore measurable, causes which have given rise to it."[7] His analysis of the two principal forms of sensation, *affective* and *representative* sensation, describes the ways that intensity is mistakenly introduced into sensation. Let us first look at an example of *representative sensation*, in which magnitudes are inserted into sensation by reference to the cause. Later, we will turn to *affective sensation*, in which magnitudes are projected into the sensation according to the number of parts of the body that are recruited into the reaction.

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[5] *Time and Free Will*, p. 70/52
[6] *Time and Free Will*, p. 70/52
[7] *Time and Free Will*, p. 4/3

1. Representative and Affective Sensation

When setting out into the spring morning for our cycling tour, our inclination to believe that the ascent of the sun into its afternoon apex will bring with it a greater intensity of heat accords nicely with common sense. The sun does seem to blaze with increased strength after midday. Together with the visual awareness of its enlarged size, we feel on our neck its proximity even more palpably. If the sun seems to hang closer to the earth, it is not only because of our actual proximity relative to it, but also because, coupled with this visual awareness, our sensation of heat seems to have increased exponentially. In this case and others like it, it is quite natural for us to hold that our sensation of heat increases. But let's look more closely at this from the standpoint of *Time and Free Will*.

While it may be true that with scientific method we can prove that the heat has increased as the day progressed, Bergson argues that it does not follow that my *sensation* of heat increases along with it. This is not to say that my sensation has not *changed* according to my position relative to the sun. Indeed it has. How then do we explain the apparent presence of quantity or intensity in this specific sensation? We all know that as the sun ascends the air temperature tends to rise. Moreover, we tend to associate certain higher or lower temperatures with specific sensations. Bergson says that it is in this manner that we relate a certain physical temperature, quantified by the thermometer, to a certain *shade* of sensation, thus transferring the idea of temperature into the sensation itself, the quantity of the cause into the quality of the effect. What was originally purely a *passing* of one simple state of my consciousness to another—each of which in truth has its own specific shade or quality—is transformed into a magnitude according to the representation of the cause. This account becomes subtler when we account for the way in which specific sensations, associated with particular causes through conventional means, solidify into what he calls "landmark sensations."[8] Our consciousness, in turn, totals up these landmarks in order to arrive at the magnitude of sensation. For instance, 22 degrees Celsius is commonly identified as optimal room temperature, and is considered by many as creating a favorable environment for home or work. When one asks, "does it seem hot in here?" this is because the temperature

[8] "We estimate the distance between the two given sensations by a rough guess at the number of these sudden jumps, or at least of the intermediate sensations which usually serve as landmarks." *Time and Free Will*, p. 68/50

has deviated from the landmark sensation to which one is most accustomed. In other words, the specific sensation of heat is not *explicitly* associated with the deviation from the actual temperature of 22 degrees, but from the landmark sensation that has been associated with it. After a while, one doesn't even need to look at a thermometer except to verify that the landmark is where it should be. To say that I am 'extremely hot' means that I have passed through the "intermediate sensations" of 'warm', 'hot,' 'very hot,' etc. And ultimately, one's claim that the afternoon sun is 'intensely hot' can be roughly attributed to the number of deviations from the sensation with which I am most comfortable, or to put it in slightly different terms, the sensation to which I have become *habituated*; namely, room temperature. "Representative sensation, looked at in itself, is pure quality; but seen through the medium of extensity, this quality becomes in a certain sense quality, and is called intensity...[This gives] them in a new form in reflective consciousness, which immediate perception did not attribute to them."[9] These kinds of sensation involve the surreptitious insertion the representation of the intensity of the cause into the effect, thus rendering what is, when taken independently of this representation, a mere change of quality into a change of quantity.

With representative sensation so defined, let us now return to our cycling tour for a moment in order to arrive at a working definition of its affective counterpart. Massive mountains await us on the horizon, and we know, as we grow closer to them, our endurance and strength will be pushed to their limits. As we begin to ascend the foothills, we can feel our respiration increasing and sweat begins to collect on our foreheads. As we get higher and the road steeper, our effort intensifies, as does the tension in our muscles. Ultimately, once we have ascended into the switchbacks and slowly snake our way toward the summit, our leg muscles saturated in lactic acid, our respiration quick and shallow, we feel as though we have reached the limit of our capacities. On the climb, it indeed does feel as though our sensation of pain has *increased*. How does the nature of this sensation differ from that of the simple increase in temperature? Of course our body temperature has risen because of the effort—*we feel hotter*—so this too is something for which we must account. But these are afterthoughts; there is something more essential at work in these kinds of sensation that cannot be accounted for in terms of the representation of the cause, as in the so-called

[9] *Time and Free Will*, p. 90/65

'representative sensations'. *Primarily* what we feel in this case is *pain,* not *heat.* How do we account for the intensity of this pain?

Bergson tells us that this can be explained simply by the number of sensations that localize at different points in the body. If the pain is slight, it is because the sensation is localized to one place at the periphery of the body. If the pain is intense, it is because sensation is distributed throughout the whole region of the body affected, or even throughout the entire body. It should not surprise us that the same confusion that applies to pain also holds for effort, given the close relationship between these two phenomena. That is, with a greater effort of the will we believe ourselves to be conscious of a greater expenditure of force. As in his explanation of pain, Bergson points out that this really amounts to the way in which this effort is distributed over a larger surface of the body and appropriates to itself a greater and greater number of organs. In what does our perception of the strength of the will consist if not the degree to which the body is brought into its efforts?

> We are conscious, not of an expenditure of force, but of the movement of the muscles that result from it[...]The more an effort seems to increase, the greater is the number of muscles which contract in sympathy with it, and that the apparent consciousness of a greater intensity of effort at a given point in the organism is reducible, in reality, to the perception of a larger surface of the body being affected.[10]
>
> [...]
>
> Our consciousness of an increase in muscular effort is reducible to the twofold perception of a greater number of peripheral sensations, and of a qualitative change occurring in some of them.[11]

What prevents us from realizing this duality between the will and the effort required to realize it is precisely our unwillingness to find in the affective state anything more than the conscious expression of an organic disturbance. Consciousness mistakes itself for the causal networks of matter, and its sole purpose becomes one of registering inwardly what has been outwardly caused.[12] Nevertheless, sensation and perception remain for Bergson a moment of consciousness. The latter, because it is irreducible to the material reality of the body, only follows the causal laws of nature by its own accord—that is, when under the direction of the intelligence, it confuses the pressures of the extended world for the cause of its affection, and reckons this as a disturbance only

[10] *Time and Free Will*, p. 24/18
[11] *Time and Free Will*, p. 26/19
[12] *Time and Free Will*, p. 32/24

according to the degree to which the feeling deviates from the preferred or habituated shade of sensation.

Let us now apply this to our example of climbing the mountain on our bicycle. While in the valley, we feel only a modicum of exertion, our legs remain loose and we have little or no pain. As we ascend into the foothills, the sensation of pain and effort increases because of the slight tightening of the calves, the quadriceps and the gluteus. As we further ascend into the switchbacks and the gradient increases, these parts combine with the muscles of the chest, the back and the arms. The lungs are strained, and the beating of the heart becomes noticeable. The 'pain' of climbing is nothing more than this general organic disturbance that is distributed throughout the entirety of the body. And we assess the intensity of our sensations by recourse to the distribution of our muscular effort at the periphery. Because the reflective intelligence is lacking in anything else by which to make this comparison, it seizes on this muscular effort or disposition of the organs to measure the intensity of our feeling of pain and the intensity of our effort. But in truth the sensation is only *contingently* linked with this specific, superficial disposition or effort of the bodily organs. Affective sensation is just this contingent bodily disposition that is confused with the sensation itself. Because the perception of the number of bodily parts recruited into the effort is what is most apparent to the intelligence, *what is fundamentally a qualitative difference is mistaken for a quantitative difference.*

We can characterize the relation between the bodily disposition and sensation in terms of a kind of intimate, differential tension. Indeed, it is this intimacy that allows for the conflation of the primordial, qualitative multiplicity of sensation with the spatialized, quantitative multiplicity of peripheral sensations, affects or bodily dispositions. But it is also this differential tension that is the condition of exercising a freedom of response vis-à-vis the body—thus does our freedom mingle so closely with what appears as a mere mechanism, plying its way, so to speak, through this mechanism's indistinct shadows. In order to realize this freedom, we must learn to distinguish the present bodily dispositions from the sensation. When this is done, we can see that the function of sensation is not merely to *reflect* what has happened in the physical structures of the organism, but also to *suggest* to consciousness what is tending to happen, thus giving it the choice of whether to yield to the automatic or habitual reactions or to interrupt this movement with other possibilities for action.

> It must be noticed that we rise by imperceptible stages from automatic to free movements, and that the latter differ from the former principally in introducing an affective sensation between the external action which occasions them and the volitional reaction which ensues. Indeed, all our actions might have been automatic, and we can surmise that there are many organized beings in whose case an external stimulus causes definite reaction without calling up consciousness as an intermediate agent. If pleasure and pain make their appearance in certain privileged beings, it is probably to call forth a resistance to the automatic reaction which would have taken place: either sensation has nothing to do, or it is nascent freedom [...] The affective state must then correspond not merely to the physical disturbances, movements or phenomenon which have taken place, but also, and especially, to those which are in preparation.[13]

As the ambiguity of sensations is effaced by the intelligence and they are identified and represented as pleasurable or painful, the differential tension, which is a condition of the freedom of the organism, appears from the standpoint of reflection to break down into a relation of identity. From now on, the *preferred pleasure* is mistaken for a *greater pleasure*. And the specific peripheral sensations upon which I have fixated as pleasurable now function as a standard by which I measure other sensations that have themselves been localized within the organism. From this moment on, the entire organism seems to be defined by this attraction to preferred pleasures. *The structure of desire now appears to be determined and to correspond with that of the organism itself*, and these desires seem to make their demands on the organism felt as a need to share in this optimal balance of pleasure. In other words, when under the spell of these habitual preferences, consciousness seems to become a passion. Bergson seeks to purge sensation of any externality that would render consciousness passive in this way.

2. The Problem of Excruciating Pain

Still, we have to wonder whether Bergson's emphatic pronouncement in *Time and Free Will* that sensation is entirely unextended doesn't overstate the case. While he faults affective and representative sensation for the way that they *localize* sensation squarely within the causal relations of the external world, Bergson now seems to *delocalize* sensation altogether, possibly going too far in the opposite direction by pushing extension entirely out of sensation. In his attempt to reclaim it as the proper

[13] *Time and Free Will*, p. 34/25

field of the qualitative multiplicity of durational consciousness, he tends to downplay the inherent ambiguity of sensation according to which it sometimes exhibits the unextended, purely qualitative differences of duration, and sometimes the qualitative differences that inhere in the body itself prior to their effacement by the reflective intelligence.

The distinction that he makes in *Time and Free Will* between the *perception of extensity* and the *conception of space* is instructive here. He says that, for instance, animals *perceive* extensity but do not *conceive* of space, and because of this likely experience the external world very differently than we do. Speaking of the animal's remarkable sense of orientation that enables it to return home by a course previously unknown to it, he states, "Qualitative differences exist everywhere in nature, and if this is the case, then why can't two distinct directions be marked in immediate perception as two colors?" Animal perception is defined by its attunement to qualitative differences within the extended world. By contrast, the conception of the homogeneous medium of space is peculiar to man. Bergson asserts that this conception of space probably represents "a kind of reaction against that heterogeneity which is the ground of experience."[14]

Our question is whether in trying to correct this reactionary tendency Bergson hasn't gone too far, thus adopting a position that can itself be characterized as reactionary. In his attempt to reclaim sensation from the spatialization that is speciously introduced in representative and affective sensation, has he also driven the extensity from sensation, making of it something that is wholly unembodied? By his own admission regarding animals, extension is not reducible to space—the latter emptied of quality, the former shot through with it. If the animal's perception is shot through with quality and yet still pertains to the extended world, why then can't man's sensation—also essentially qualitative —exhibit this same extendedness?

There is a further problem with his account in *Time and Free Will*. As compelling as his conception of sensation is in moments, it is unconvincing particularly when we try to understand *excruciating forms of pain* through it. With respect to the kind of pain associated with climbing the Mont Ventoux on our bicycles, for instance, we have seen that intuition can reveal the qualitative differences that are hidden behind this pain, and thereby reveal the way that we measure it relative to our preferred

[14] *Time and Free Will*, p. 97/72

affective states. Pushing ourselves harder simply involves overcoming these personal preferences and inuring ourselves to these qualitative differences in sensation. But what about *torturous* pain, or pain that expresses itself as an external aggression? Is there not a difference in kind between torturous pain and that of climbing the summit road on our bicycles? When confronting this form of pain, are we not struck by the externality of pain to consciousness? How can we continue to maintain that sensation not genuinely extended in the face of such pain?

Bergson's early definition of sensation revolves around a clear opposition between quality, which is held to be subjective and unextended, and quantity, which is held to be objective and extended, and he seeks to reveal how one is speciously derived from the other. Sensation, he argues, never genuinely registers quantity, and thus never provides consciousness with a real point of interface with the objective world of extensive magnitudes except in a purely symbolical way. As a further example of the difference of kind between the intensive and the extensive, Bergson suggests an experiment in which we hold a pin in our right hand and prick our life hand progressively more deeply:

> At first we shall feel as it were a tickling, then a touch which is succeeded by a prick, then a pain localized at a point, and finally the spreading of this pain over the surrounding area. And the more we reflect on it, the more clearly shall we see that we are here dealing with so many qualitatively distinct sensations, so many varieties of a single species. But yet we spoke at first of one an the same sensation which spread further and further, of one prick which increased in intensity. The reason is that, without noticing it, we localized in the sensation of the left hand, which is pricked, the progressive effort of the right hand, which pricks. We thus introduce the cause into the effect, and unconsciously interpreted quality as quantity, intensity as magnitude.[15]

This example underscores much of what is problematic about Bergson's account and gives rise to a number of perplexities: Do we really measure the magnitude of the pain of a pinprick simply by recourse to the parts of the body that are recruited into the effort of pressure from the other hand? If this is the case, how can we account for the magnitude of pain of a pinprick received by accident? Could this really be a matter of imagining to myself the number of parts of my own body that would be necessary to produce such a feeling, and then transferring this imagined representation of the foreign cause into the magnitude of the immediate effect? And, from the standpoint of

[15] *Time and Free Will*, p. 43/32

affective sensation, is the magnitude of pain really a simple matter of the number of body parts that are recruited into the reaction? Against Bergson's account, do we not feel the pain of a pinprick the most at *precisely* the point at which it is received? While it is true that the entire body is drafted into the reaction, perhaps this pertains to the way that this external aggression seems to threaten to disturb the real material integrity of the organic totality that is my own extended body. And, finally, if sensation is entirely unextended, why does it localize here rather than there? If it is the case that there is something more at stake in this sort of sensation that the tendency to confuse the cause and the effect, then Bergson's entire account would appear to be insufficient.

Whereas in *Time and Free Will* he attempts to dismantle the presuppositions involved in the attribution of extensity to sensation while nonetheless conceding their utility, in *Matter and Memory* he ultimately resuscitates its extensity in the name of common sense. That is, he begins by accepting the common sense belief that extended matter is entirely real. He now holds that matter, far from being merely a *derivation* of duration, is simply *duration in actualization*. For this reason, we can attribute to sensation an actual extensity, however 'vaguely localized' it might be, rather than just the mere appearance of extension that we find in his accounts of affective and representative sensation in *Time and Free Will*.

3. Interval and Affection

Beginning with the image of matter, as he does in *Matter and Memory*, provides several conceptual advantages. The most notable among them is that it makes it possible to speak of the practical, embodied situation of the organism without totally subordinating it to his concept of intensive duration. Rather, duration and matter are understood to be *the two sides of reality*. But more importantly, as we will see, this shift in his thought provides better resources for accounting for the objections that we just raised concerning excruciating pain.

The more balanced approach of *Matter and Memory* is as much in evidence in his elucidation of the image of matter and perception as it is in his revised conception of sensation. Beyond the limit between external objects and the object that is my own body, consciousness utilizes perception to monitor the practical situation in which the organism finds itself. Far from being a faculty of representation or contemplation for

the subject, perception functions first of all to prepare the body for action by appraising the organism of the promises and threats that await it in the material world. In the early work, perception was held to be a specific mode of subjective sensation. In the later work, perception goes as much together with the image of objective matter, which is the domain of action for the organism, as it does with the subject. To be more precise, perception is no longer merely a specific mode of sensation, but also ranges over the image of objective matter.

Just as matter in this view possesses real extensity, so also does perception involve real extended movement within it. "There is no perception that is not prolonged into movement."[16] The nervous centers within the body represent the instruments of perception and movement. Bergson states, "My nervous system, interposed between objects which affect my body and those which I can influence, is a mere conductor, transmitting, sending back or inhibiting movement."[17] Through the inhibition of movement, the nervous system creates an interval that is a necessary condition for the free response of the organism. This interval is the opening in which free responses to the appeals from the extended body and from the external world begin to articulate themselves. Freedom is not a property that merely exists somewhere deep in the subject. Rather, it follows from the interface between deep states, comprised primarily of pure unextended memories, and superficial efforts that concern the situation of my body relative to its extended surroundings.

Bergson is somewhat unclear on the precise nature of this relationship, suggesting sometimes that it is the memories that launch themselves into the intervals of sensation, sometimes that these intervals involve an effort to actively take up merely passive memories. This obscurity dissolves straightaway when we see that it is *consciousness* that plays the active role here, ranging relentlessly between the extensive and inextensive. Consciousness occupies itself simultaneously with the reflections of the material world that are provided in perception and with probing the depths of memory, selecting those images that might aid it in its efforts to create new advantages for the body. The interval is thus *an interval of consciousness*. It is the interval that follows from every genuine question of vital interest for the human being—an interval

[16] *Matter and Memory*, p. 94/101
[17] *Matter and Memory*, p. 44/43

that indicates not so much an interruption of action for contemplation as the nascence of a form of action that is novel and unpredictable.

It is in this way that the organism makes of itself a *center* within the material world. But we are not speaking of a center in the sense of a definite, geometrical point located at the center of a plane with infinitely receding boundaries, but a *center of indetermination* that renders unpredictable and indefinite the relationships between it and the objects with which it shares the universe.

> This center is not a mathematical point; it is a body, exposed, like all natural bodies, to the action of external causes which threaten to disintegrate it...It does not merely reflect action received from without; it struggles, and thus absorbs some part of this action. Here is the source of affection.[18]

While the organism surely also possesses mechanisms of reflex that deploy unconsciously, it is because of the indetermination of the center that it is much more than the sum of these reflexes. In the interval of perception the organism chooses between the hosts of different reflex movements, each with its own highly specific function vis-à-vis the surrounding material environment. Moreover, the interval allows for a *refinement* of these physiological reflexes, and in it the organism liberates itself from mere repetitions of the same movements in the face of subtly differing situations.

Concretely, this interval reveals itself in the form of a *distance* between the center that is my own body and the object of perception. Of course this distance is not originally one that is measured according to conventional metrics; the latter are always introduced as abstractions after the distance is immediately revealed to consciousness as interval. The organism uses this interval to choose among the host of possibilities for its specific response, which are imagined in the form of virtual actions. As the objective distance between my body and the object of vital interest closes, so too does the interval in which the memory images can launch themselves into it, thereby providing the organism not only a window of freedom for response vis-à-vis the approaching object, but also a means of structuring these responses. In the immanence of contact, when the object is either pressed upon me or me upon it, the response realizes itself as act.

[18] *Matter and Memory*, p. 56/57

4. The Spectrum of Sensation

But what is the precise point of contact between the unextended virtual images and those of the material world? Mustn't there be a locale in which the organism can be resolved into *actual* centers and not simply virtual ones, if only instantaneously? Where, but in the extended body, can the actual *contact* between the organism and the material world occur? It is precisely in affection that we discover that aspect of the organism that is fettered by the material world—this is why pain localizes in the place where it is felt.

But still, sensation is not wholly reducible to the image of matter either. It is a spectrum that includes ambiguous sensations that are not entirely affective or bodily. As in *Time and Free Will*, Bergson conceives of sensations as the intermediate states between deep-seated feelings and actual efforts. What distinguishes his position in *Matter and Memory* from that of the earlier work is not only that he now conceives of these intermediate states to be "vaguely" localized and extended, but also that pain—being that extremity of the spectrum of sensation that is immanent to matter—now genuinely exhibits extension:

> Between images and ideas—the former extended and the latter unextended—[there are] a series of intermediate states, more or less vaguely localized, which are the *affective* states. Our understanding, yielding to its customary illusion, poses the dilemma that a thing either is or is not extended, and as the affective states participates vaguely in extension, is in fact imperfectly localized, we conclude that this state is absolutely unextended[...]There is hardly any perception which may not, by the increase of the action of its object upon our body, become an affection, and more particularly, pain. Thus we pass insensibly from the contact of a pin to its prick. Inversely, the decreasing pain coincides with the lessening perception of its cause, and exteriorizes itself, so to speak, into a representation. So it does seem, then, as if there is a difference of degree and not of nature between affection and perception.[19]

Similar to perception, affection is no longer conceived merely as a mode of subjective sensation, but represents the extremity of a spectrum that ranges from extensity on the one side to the unextended on the other. It is the "that part or aspect of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies" and "[it] possesses, from the outset, a

[19] *Matter and Memory*, p. 53/53

certain determination of extensity."[20] Both perception and affection are adaptive faculties of the body which occupy intermediate positions between the image of objective matter and the pure memory which is the true substance of the subject. Exhibiting both extensity and qualitative multiplicity, sensation supplies the condition of freedom within the real world.

In the above description, we discover the reason why intermediate sensations are conceived to be only 'vaguely' localized. To the degree that the higher organism is always characterized by a virtual reserve of possibilities for action, it cannot be determinatively situated in that system of images called 'the material world.' The ability of the organism to stretch between duration on the one side and matter on the other is always the best measure of its vitality. While the organism must in every instant *resolve itself* or *be resolved* into definite relations within the external world, this instantaneous resolution into definite relations does not exhaust its possibilities; a halo of indetermination endures in the continuity of perception and intermediate sensation, forever *passing beyond* the actual moment of extension into which the part of the organism has been resolved.

Pain arises at the precise moment and place at which the material object *acts* upon our body or the body upon it. "While perception measures the reflecting power of the body, affection measures its power to absorb."[21] By this Bergson simply means that perception indicates the ability of the body to prepare itself for action. Affection, on the other hand, indicates an ability to endure the actual situatedness of the body among other bodies. "Affection is that part or aspect of the inside of our body which we mix with the image of external bodies." [22]

Among the errors which lead the psychologist to consider sensation as unextended is the way that the localization of an affective sensation in one part of the body appears to be a matter of gradual training.

> A certain time elapses before the child can touch with the finger the precise point where it has been pricked [by a pin]. The fact is indisputable, but all that can be concluded from it is that some tentative essays are required to coordinate the painful impressions on the skin, which has received the prick, with the impressions of the muscular sense, which guides the movement, of arm and hand...There is, for each affection, an immediate localization of a certain kind, a local color which

[20] *Matter and Memory*, pp. 58/59, 59/61
[21] *Matter and Memory*, p. 56/57
[22] *Matter and Memory*, p. 58/59

> is proper to it...There must be in the affection itself something which distinguishes it from other affections of the same kind and permits of its reference to this or that potential datum of sight or touch rather than to any other. But is this not equivalent to saying that affection possesses, from the outset, a certain determination of extensity?[23]

Now we can see how, Bergson's early position also renders both perception and affection inexplicable, insofar as they posses nothing within themselves that would indicate why they should be localized in this place within space rather than that. To overcome this problem, Bergson shifts away from conceiving of sensation as utterly unextended, and begins by positing the totality of perceived images. Perception, in his view, does not begin as *my* perception, but gradually limits itself to my body from the aggregate of perceived images that surround it, ultimately realizing my body as a privileged center of action and personality. This means that my body is not my own at the outset. With its transformation into a center of action vis-à-vis the outside world, it gradually *becomes* my own. The localization of affection measures the progress of this process, as does the degree to which I have made my body into an instrument of action and self-preservation.

Pain is the partial or vague materialization of that part of the body that is affected. This means that, in the part of the body that is affected, there is a danger that it will be drawn even further down into the image of matter, and this represents a threat to the integrity and durability of the organism. The localized part of the body is tending toward subjection to the physical laws that govern the image of the material world, and for this reason pain signifies something akin to a simple reaction to stimulus. But, as we said a moment ago, the affect is localized to the part of the body that absorbs the impact, and the halo of indetermination that characterizes the center that is my own virtual body continues on, enveloping and adjusting itself to the new situation. For this reason, not only can I *feel* that I am in pain, I can *perceive* it. Likewise, not only am I *reacting* to the pain, I am *responding*. That doctors, in spite of their own extreme pain, have under urgent circumstances been known to perform surgery on their own open wounds attests to this differential tension in affection and perception, which is really just the enduring tension between a present (re)action of the body and future possibilities for action.

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[23] *Matter and Memory*, p. 59/60

But we must ask this question: what happens when this differential tension *really* closes into the identity and massivity of externality, when I can no longer *perceive* my own wound because the pain is too great? We are of course speaking of those instances of excruciating pain in which the organism is *wholly* absorbed by it—so much so that perception itself ceases. And because perception and affection are two aspects on the same objective plane of the organism—the one reflecting and the other absorbing—if perception ceases, it is also likely that affection goes along with it. *The entire image of the material world seems to collapse into the torturous suffering of the organism.* At least from the standpoint of the bystander, the organism appears to become inert materiality and is reduced to nothing more than a twitching bundle of flesh, bones and nerve fiber. The damaged body withdraws entirely into its own mechanisms and "closed system of automatic movements." [24] The intervals of consciousness into which virtual images are launched have closed utterly, the body becoming entirely unreceptive to memory and devoid of personality. If it has survived the impact, the healing mechanisms of the body must do their work. And it is not as if the organism *waits* for this to happen—waiting implies an interval of perception, which has closed, as has the opportunity for memories to be taken up by the organism into action. The body is given over to the pure massivity and alterity of matter. "If you abolish my consciousness, the material universe subsists exactly as it was; only, since you have removed that particular rhythm of duration which was the condition of my action upon things, these things draw back into themselves."[25]

We saw that Bergson argues in *Time and Free Will* that the degrees of intensity in affection are really just unextended qualitative differences that are interpreted by the organism as extended quantitative intensities, and this for the practical purpose of maintaining an optimal balance vis-à-vis its environment. Bergson says that this optimal balance is really just the *preferred* state of the organism, but its status as preference is masked as a determination from without. The sensation is shrouded in the forms of the external world and this conceals the primordial unextended qualitative multiplicity at the heart of sensation. We found this to be insufficient because it fails to account for the way in which sensation marks a contact with something genuinely outside of consciousness, which is best exemplified in the externality of excruciating pain. Finally

[24] *Matter and Memory*, p. 80/82
[25] *Matter and Memory*, p. 208/233

the same question that we asked in terms of *Time and Free Will* we put to *Matter and Memory*: what happens when the organism is subjected to torturous forms of pain? We found his position in *Matter and Memory* to be superior insofar as it characterizes sensation as a *spectrum* ranging from the vague extendedness of intermediate sensation to the genuinely and precisely localized affection, which provides a means of accounting for the externality of pain.

8

The Force of the Present: A Bergsonian Challenge to Psychophysics

> Now it is beginning to dawn on maybe five or six brains that physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to ourselves! if I may say so) and not an explanation of the world. But to the extent that physics rests on belief in the senses, it passes for more, and will continue to pass for more, namely for an explanation, for a long time to come. It has our eyes and our fingers as its allies, it has visual evidence and tangibility as its allies. This helped it to enchant, persuade, convince an age with basically plebeian taste—indeed, it instinctively follows the cannon of truth of the eternally popular sensualism. What is plain, what "explains"? Only what can be seen and felt,—this is as far as any problem has been pursued.
>
> —Friederich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Bergson's philosophy poses a challenge to the ordinary direction of thought. Like Nietzsche, Bergson believes that until now all philosophy and science—indeed all intellectual thinking—is secretly oriented by the aim of securing the conditions for a particular form of organic life. This kind of thought invariably presents itself as disinterested, and still it congratulates itself for having discovered what it covets most—the objective truth. But what if truth does not find its ultimate basis with the object, but with the subject? And what if, rather than providing a window into the present, sense-perception merely outlines an interest of the subject that pertains more to its future than its present?

In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson pursues these problems further than physics, which is content to translate common sense (what Nietzsche has called, 'popular sensualism') into scientific principles. He seeks to determine what in their ostensibly 'impartial' and 'objective' accounts of material reality can be attributed to the practical

interests and instincts of the embodied subject, and he challenges those concepts of the physicists that neglect the way in which these interests play an essential role in shaping their vision of objective reality. Likewise, he disputes psychological theories that lean heavily upon the concepts of physicists in their efforts to explain human experience, and which, by inverting the true order of subject and object, subordinate the subject to the blind mechanisms of the material world. In Bergson's view, these theories all exhibit the same error; namely, that they project beneath what originally appears to consciousness as the brightly colored whirlwind of the senses the colorless, impersonal medium of space within which qualitative difference is flattened out and equalized. Now, rather than appearing in their true light as so many variously colored local differences of tone and hue, the objects of experience assume the appearance of already-composed, mutually indifferent objects, each of which is driven from behind by invisible forces.

Nevertheless, like Nietzsche, Bergson's aims far surpass those of Kantian critique. His aim is not only to supplant wrong-headed epistemological and metaphysical concepts with carefully examined ones or to reveal the conditions of possible experience but, more ambitiously, to liberate the creative powers of consciousness which are effectively suppressed by spatial thinking. However, the comparison with Kant is not totally inappropriate. While Bergson has no interest in a further enumeration of the transcendental conditions of possible experience, believing these to resemble the principles of physics in the way that they follow the ordinary direction of thought and, as such, amount to nothing more than a further codification of commons sense, his goal is one of revealing *the real conditions of experience as such*.[1] Indeed, the latter task remains subordinated to the former; the examination of the conditions of experience will have the effect of reintroducing us to what is also the condition of our creative involvement with the material world. With these dual tasks in mind, Bergson suggests a radically new method according to which the pure duration that dwells behind our customary images of the material world can be revealed; *the method of intuition*. In the intuition of pure duration, which is in the words of Jean Hyppolite, "pure succession, the extension of the past into the present and therefore

[1] Deleuze, G. (1991). *Bergsonism.* (H. Tomlinson, & B. Habberjam, Trans.) New York City: Zone Books. p. 23

already memory," we are returned to the depths of the subject and the sense of our own freedom is renewed.[2]

What will interest us in this chapter is not only Bergson's critique of physics on the basis of his concepts of duration and memory, but also the implications of this critique for psychophysics, specifically as it pertains to affection. Though *Matter and Memory* deals with these implications, its broader aim is the critique of the tradition of metaphysics and epistemology. *Time and Free Will*, Bergson's first major work, also concerned the way in which the concepts that we use to understand and act upon the external world distort our understanding of the subject. His central aim is to drive the principles of physics out of our psychological understanding of man. In the latter work, the notion of *force* as it is applied to affection is among the main target of his attacks, and it is this notion that will also be one of the main focuses of our inquiry.

The main line of his early critique is the following: If, as he argues, the center of the subject is devoid of extensity, must we not also understand sensation, which is itself a moment of subjective consciousness, as yet another moment of the same unextended durational multiplicity, only now pertaining to the peripheral body? If sensation lacks extensity, then in what sense can we assert that it increases or decreases according to the forces that are exerted on the body? In *Time and Free Will* he arrives at the following conclusion: Sensation is indeed a moment of consciousness and a function of the subject—which is itself comprised only of the unextended qualitative multiplicity of duration—and so it must also be entirely unextended. As such, the Fechnerian notion that sensation registers degrees of force is incorrect.

Many of the conclusions of the earlier work will return in the later one, if in a more refined form. But with the later work, which will be the main focus of this essay, we nevertheless find a rather radical shift in perspective concerning both the status of sensation and that of the extended world. While *Matter and Memory* also concerns the way that the form of homogenous space obscures the true nature of the subject and consequently diminishes its free will, it also submits a revised understanding of material reality. Whereas before extended matter was subordinated entirely to the subject, really existing only as a function of its representations, in *Matter and Memory* this extensity is restored—now extended matter is understood to be yet another moment of duration whose 'tension' is relaxed (a claim that we will examine in some detail later

[2] Hyppolite, J. "Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson". in L. Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism.* New York: Continuum. p. 112

on). The material world, even if it depends upon the subject for its sense, is nonetheless accorded an ontological status equal to that of a subject. Thus, with *Matter and Memory* Bergson passes beyond his earlier position and accords to sensation its own materiality. These sensations that were formerly understood merely as moments of the subject's unextended durational consciousness are now understood to be sensations of a world that is genuinely extended, and to occupy an ambiguous position intermediate between the subject and the present object. Accordingly, the material world is understood to exist in a kind of equiprimordial tension with the subject, each according to their respective durations. Sensation registers just this tension.

Given the way that the later Bergson restores to materiality its own existence, this chapter reopens the question of whether we might characterize the movements of matter in terms of force—a question that Bergson does not readdress on the terrain of the later work. We will find that within the revised understanding of sensation of *Matter and Memory* there is indeed a place for the reintroduction of something akin to the common sense notion that affection admits of degrees of force. But this novel concept of force must nevertheless differ fundamentally from that of psychophysics. Whereas psychophysics suggests that sensation merely translates degrees of force coming from the objects of the extended world into degrees of discomfort and pain for the subject, the concept that we will suggest is one in which an increase of force measures the movement by which the subject is deprived by degrees of its capacity for a free response to the material world.

1. Sensation and Memory

More succinctly than Nietzsche ever could, Bergson managed to demonstrate that, rather than laying bare the true nature of material reality, physics offers nothing more than "an interpretation and arrangement of the world according to ourselves." More than this, by pointing out how perception merely outlines our virtual action upon its objects, Bergson problematized the notion that perception grants to consciousness access to the immediate givenness of objects; a fact which renders dubious the physicist's belief that the senses provide visual evidence and tangibility for the principles of his science. If perception seems to exhibit objects positioned indifferently within space, this has more to do with the way in which the perceptual function dilutes

qualitative multiplicity in view of the subject's action than with anything essential about its objects. This dilution of qualitative multiplicity corresponds with the emergence of perceptual habits according to which the object increasingly reveals itself as a ready-made thing. This object, like all objects, must have initially presented itself as an event of pure qualitative difference between itself and what preceded it. But as consciousness progressively selects from its qualities what is useful, increasingly filtering out what is unusable in view of securing the exigencies of life, qualitative differences begin to make their retreat into pure memory, leaving only the hollowed-out crust of our habitual bearing toward the object remaining. It is this inert crust that physics takes as its object. Likewise, it is this inert crust that forms the basis of our representations. Nevertheless, these qualitative differences continue to abide in the original event in which this reality was encountered; only now they no longer appear for perception, but are consigned to memory alone. If one plumbs deeply enough in memory, one can discover this original event in its purity, unalloyed with the habitual mechanisms that have come to replace it within perceptual experience.

In Bergson's later view, there are two principle substances that synthesize in concrete perception: sensation and memory. Whereas sensation is the feeling of movement within matter, memory is the virtual ground from which these movements derive their sense. Perception's chief interest is matter in movement, whether to move it oneself or to evade the movements emanating from the object, and it avails itself of the assistance of memory images to fulfill this interest. Perception avails itself of memory not only to find in movement the confirmation of expectations vis-à-vis what has happened before or deviations from these expectations that demand novel responses, memory also suggests to perception movements that can supplement habitual reactions and thus further assist it in its free traffic with external objects.

As a ceaseless search for openings in the present movements of matter within which to insert the memories of the past, the special office of perception is really to carry the subject forward into the future. These 'openings' it finds in the *distance* between itself and its objects.[3] For concrete perception, what this distance measures is not an area of objective space as physics understands it, but rather *an interval of duration* within which it can turn to memory for answers to the question of how it might adjust its relation to its object. As this durational interval closes, so too do the

[3] *Matter and Memory*, p. 57/55

opportunities for possible adjustments. If they are to be successful, these adjustments must always involve a kind of intimate dance with the object, whereby the subtlest movements of the object are anticipated and answered with movements of ones own. Perceptual consciousness must inwardly mimic the movements of objects in order to appropriate them to itself and thereby pass beyond them toward a future that is entirely its own. In this way, just as it reflects the anticipated movements of the external world, perception also prepares those of one's own body that will be necessary to respond to external movements.

However, as a sensation tends to overpower the efforts of perception for thwarting the movements of external bodies, this registers within consciousness as affection, which Bergson identifies as a 'specialized perception.' And while there is no perceptual sensation which, by the increase of the action of its object upon our body, may not become an affection, there is likewise no external source of affection which, when distanced from the body, may not become perceptual sensation.[4] Whereas perception concerns the sensation of movement of external bodies, affection involves the sensation of movement within my own body. The latter represents the moment when movement encroaches on my body; the former the moment when this encroachment remains merely virtual. Thus, the body does not merely *reflect* the action of external objects in the mode of perception; it also *absorbs* some measure of this action in the mode of affection.[5] Affection is thus a special kind of perception in which what is perceived is the sensation of an external movement that encroaches upon the common limit between the external world and one's own body.

Both concrete perception and the specialized perception of affection can be opposed to what Bergson calls 'pure perception,' which merely reflects the 'instantaneous' movement of external objects and their reciprocal relations.[6] Bergson tells us that pure perception exists only in principle. We might say that it occupies much the same position in *Matter and Memory* as the concept of 'sense-certainty' does within Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. That is, it functions in no trivial way to highlight the deficiencies in former philosophical concepts of perception according to which it is held to plainly apprehend immediately present objects and provide an uncomplicated starting point from which to understand our relation with them.

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[4] *Matter and Memory*, p. 53/53
[5] *Matter and Memory*, p. 56/57
[6] *Matter and Memory*, pp. 58/59, 65/67

But perception appears as simple, unmediated presence-to-object only when the essential role that memory plays in synthesizing instances of movement is repressed or ignored, as it is by materialism. While it is true that the sensational component within perception originates from the action of the object upon the sensitive nerves and ranges from "elementary vibrations" that are perceived as color or sound to the movements of solid mass, concrete perception is nevertheless much more than this.[7] It selects from these vibrations only those that are of vital concern for the body. However essential it may be, the reflective activity of perception forms only one aspect of its function. It not only *reflects* in the manner of a mirror of immediate presence, but it also *searches* for openings within this reflection to insert the virtual images of memory into the impending encounter. This reflective activity that is always also a search for openings is the special office of perception for the living organism.[8] The understanding of perception that is presupposed by Newtonian physics and articulated by psychophysics foregrounds perception's reflective dimension while ignoring its searching activity.

With his concept of pure perception—a kind of perception that is not unlike those presupposed by physics and psychological materialism—Bergson has put memory out of play only long enough to persuade us of its necessity. But this is not all. The concept of pure perception also minimizes the vital role that concrete perception plays with regard to avoiding or fostering affection, which involves a movement that impacts the body itself. Insofar as the very real experience of affection transforms what from the ideal standpoint of pure perception is merely one among many objective points within the image of matter into a center of action and vital concern, we have to wonder if it does not also provide both the orientation and the real impetus for concrete perception, whether to protect the organism from harm or to reward it with pleasure. Bergson never says as much, and we will return to this question in a moment. In any case, it is certain that the sensation of movement is taken by the organism as nothing less than a call for action from the material world—a call for action that is always also a call to memory for assistance in preparing this action.

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[7] *Matter and Memory*, p. 138/153

[8] My perception appears to follow all the vibratory detail of the so called sensitive nerves; and on the other hand I know that the rôle of their vibrations is solely to prepare the reaction of my body on neighboring bodies, to sketch out my virtual actions. Perception, therefore, consists in detaching, from the totality of objects, the possible action of my body upon them. Perception appears, then, as only a choice." *Matter and Memory*, p. 229/220

As the sensation of movement diminishes, concrete perception increasingly becomes the experience of the distinct multiplicity of inert objects and, for this reason, tends to find qualitative difference only in an attenuated form. In this kind of perception, quality takes the aspect of an accidental feature that is subordinated, as it were, to the *being* of the object.[9] But this no more implies that the numerical multiplicity of objects should be accorded a genuine ontological priority than it does that quality is truly a subordinate moment of objectivity.

It is enough that perception should find qualitative differences that inhere in extension in a "diluted" form, so that they would become for it "practically negligible."[10] Primarily, what matters for perception is the way in which it marks out its objects as indifferent, harmful or helpful for the organism. The dilution of qualitative difference performed in concrete perception reveals itself as the condition for calculation and control, representing the principle condition for action. If perception concerned itself with qualitative differences too much, this would undermine its function for the organism, which is to hastily sum up its objects according to vital needs.

Moreover, the tendency for the dilution of qualitative multiplicity that characterizes everyday perception goes together with a slackening of the tension between the present and the past, and issues in our habitual comportments vis-à-vis objective reality. What this means is that, in everyday perception, durational consciousness has *relaxed* vis-à-vis the perceived object. Because the object represents nothing troubling for the body, consciousness has halted its search for differences between its immediate experience and those of the past. And as the tension of duration slackens, so also does novelty disappear: objects are simply what they are. There is no vital need to interrogate them more deeply or to turn to memory for answers.

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[9] This is perhaps best exemplified in the difference between hearing sounds and listening for words: "How can the sounds perceived speak to memory, how can they choose, in the storehouse of auditory images, those which should come to rejoin them, unless they have been already separated, distinguished, - in short, perceived, - as syllables and as words?" *Matter and Memory*, p. 110/121

[10] *Matter and Memory*, p. 182/203

2. Force, Effort

While Bergson concedes to physics that real movement is a feature of the material world, he hesitates to characterize these movements of matter in terms of *force,* and still less does he embrace a concept of absolute movement, due to the confused role that these concepts play in psychophysics and Newtonian physics.[11] Indeed, the former appropriates these concepts from the latter, which holds that movement is merely a relative change of place within absolute space. In this theory, motion and space are together conceived as *absolutes*. While absolute motion is understood by recourse to impersonal forces, absolute space provides the location within which these impersonal forces exert themselves. And even if movement is relativized among the objects that populate it, homogenous space remains for materialism the backdrop against which the moving objects offset themselves. By uncritically appropriating this concept of force from physics, psychophysics merely takes over the same problems that define it. Only now, inasmuch as psychophysics attempts to account for the *qualitative* changes of consciousness by recourse to quantities of force, these problems are multiplied.

In place of these concepts of impersonal force and absolute motion, Bergson suggests a radical redefinition of the extended world. Movement, he says, is far from absolute. First of all, we must not imagine that it inheres in reality itself independent of perception and affection; it only unfolds for consciousness as *an indivisible act*. Only once the impersonal medium of homogenous space is thrown beneath material movement by the intellect does movement admit of divisibility. Not only does physics break this movement into divisible parts, it also posits behind it profound causes which are invisible to consciousness.[12] But these profound causes, Bergson suggests, are really just *analogues* of the feeling of effort that have been objectified and stripped of their qualitative dimension. And while Newtonian physics merely substantializes and objectifies this subjective feeling of effort in its concept of the movement of impersonal forces, psychophysics places the body within a universe within which this falsely objectified substance exerts itself upon it, and explains the body's feelings by recourse to these forces.

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[11] *Matter and Memory*, p. 193/216
[12] *Matter and Memory*, p. 195/218

As we can see, '*force' is really just alienated or exteriorized effort*—that is, this concept finds its original basis in a *sensation* of effortful movement has been momentarily divorced from the vital schema that memory provides. Now, this sensation has been stripped of its inherent relation to the interiority of the subject, characterized as it is by quality alone, and outwardly-projected into the external world, which is supposed to feature quantities of force behind every apparent quality. In physics and psychophysics alike, the movement of the objective world is explained only by surreptitiously introducing into it an analogue of our feeling of effort.

Nevertheless, far from being so many useless deceptions, those theories of matter that project impersonal forces into the indifferent, homogenous medium of space actually speak to the needs of the organism. The same distortion of the real that is in evidence in these theories represents the condition according to which reality admits of a higher order of calculation and control. Linguistic communication also depends upon such a leveling out and dilution of qualitative difference as that which we find in these theories. However, these theories of physics have effectively *radicalized* these distortions and exalted them with the name of truth. Every form of materialism, Bergson says, "is an attempt to find the reality hidden beneath the...customary images which are entirely relative to our needs."[13]

In order to dislodge these misleading images, Bergson does not begin with assuming the truth of those concepts which aid in the effort to secure our needs. Rather, he proposes that we begin with what is *useless*—namely, the qualitative multiplicity of duration—and proceed from there to trace the movement of genesis according to which the useful comes to assume its position of primacy and eventually substitute itself for genuine truth. Involving an "an intense and unusual effort" that at once takes us in a direction that runs contrary to the exigencies of useful action and, in doing so, reveals the qualitative multiplicity that lurks behind our conventional concepts, the method of intuition yields a vital framework within which to understand how quantity comes to replace quality, and how the power that our needs exert functions to determine our understanding of the real.[14] With this method, Bergson has shown us how to put our needs out of play long enough to arrive at their sense, thus offering us a

[13] *Matter and Memory*, p. 200/226
[14] *Matter and Memory*, p. 187/209

new, vital schema within which to understand our relations with the world and with ourselves.

Let us review the critique of the psychophysical concept of force that we find in *Time and Free Will*: if sensation is devoid of extensity, in what way can it be said to increase or diminish? Insofar as the representation of a measurable cause is thoughtlessly introduced into an immeasurable effect, such an explanation involves a vicious circle. And if extensity and intensity are indeed different in kind, the relation between them could not even be one of cause and effect—the sensation is merely distorted into an objective relation and thus conceals under the rubric of causality the pure unextended qualitative indeterminacy that is inherent to sensation.[15] Furthermore, if pain and pleasure can be said to increase or diminish, the greater pain must *contain* the lesser, which condemns us to the absurd position that unextended sensations can be piled one upon another, almost in the manner of a child's toy blocks. In this relationship of container and contained, the Bergson of *Time and Free Will* suggests that we discover the key to understanding what is wrong with the notion that intensities can be measured in terms of magnitudes—we have spatialized something that by its very nature does not inhere in space.

However, is there not a place for the reintroduction of the common sense notion that pain and pleasure is subject to increases and decreases of intensity in the later conception of affective sensation? How are we to understand the law-like regularity with which the image of the material world operates, or the way in which every action within this image produces an equal and opposite reaction that involves a precisely measurable transfer of energy from one to the other, if not by recourse to a concept of force? In *Matter and Memory*, he tells us that affection measures the power of the body to absorb the organism's contact with the material world. What precisely does affection measure, what does it absorb, if not forceful movements? If we concede to sensation an amount of extensity, must we not also concede that it is subject to the forces that move there, and thus also the common sense belief that pain is subject to diminution and increase? How are we to understand the intensification of sensation which issues in pain?

With *Matter and Memory*, the conception of sensation has changed. It is now held to be 'vaguely' or partially extended and localized. In Chapter 3, Bergson makes

[15] *Time and Free Will*, p. 2/2

an even stronger claim than this: "We must make up our minds to it: sensation is, in its essence, extended and localized; it is a source of movement. Pure memory, being inextensive and powerless, does not in any degree share the nature of sensation."[16] Whereas in Chapter 1, sensation was held to be vaguely localized, in Chapter 3 sensation is regarded as the mark of the present within perception, "the very materiality of our existence."[17] Nevertheless, the former position remains true from the standpoint of memory, which constantly finds fissures in the material world within which it can insert itself. However extended sensation may be, it does not resolve itself into a kind of impenetrable or massive identity. Affection and perception, *insofar as they endure*, continue to offer to memory new points of purchase according to which they can then materialize themselves. As such, sensation can still be characterized as nascent freedom.

> There is not, in man at least, a purely sensory-motor state, any more than there is in him an imaginative life without some slight activity beneath it. Our psychical life, as we have said, oscillates normally between these two extremes. On the one hand, the present sensory-motor state delineates the present direction of memory, being nothing else, in fact than its actual and acting extremity; and on the other hand, this memory itself, with the totality of our past, is continually pressing forward, so as to insert the largest possible part of itself into the present action.[18]

The present is the moment in which virtual memory is transfigured into matter, into something *actually lived*. As memory comes to the aid of the body, it contracts itself into its other, and it momentarily loses its virtuality in the present lived experience. Nevertheless, the virtual is not a kind of finite reserve that is progressively used up in and by the present. The total memory of the past always remains—it has merely been momentarily *forgotten* and driven back upon itself in the (sensation of) effort to secure the immediate exigencies of life. The present, embodied self has selected from memory what is useful to it, and it leaves the rest to itself, "suspended in the void."[19] Though memory actualizes itself in the present in one moment, it is recovered within the broader unity of memory in the next. In this regard, there is no genuine fragmentation of memory. It remains forever integral and intact. It hangs together with

[16] *Matter and Memory*, p. 140/155
[17] *Matter and Memory*, p. 139/154
[18] *Matter and Memory*, p. 168/187
[19] *Matter and Memory*, p. 151/168

itself as a unity that always stretches from the deepest memory of pure qualitative multiplicity that characterizes embryonic life to that of the immediately recovered present which, in passing, has itself fallen back into the memories of the past. Sensation is simply the point of contact between the extended world and the virtual. In one sense, it is immanently situated on the plane of extension. In another, it is the tip of the cone that is memory itself.[20]

Every psychophysical account of mental phenomenon has two fundamental metaphysical presuppositions: firstly, that the reality of present objects is always already formed as a distinct multiplicity, and secondly, that the organism has no unique ontological status of its own, being just one among other beings within the discrete multiplicity of this reality. According to this account, sensation is nothing more than the simple encounter between the mechanisms of the organism and this already-formed multiplicity of objects. And memories, in this account, are nothing more the lasting traces of these encounters that are inscribed in the brain, which is regarded as a kind of storehouse of past sensations. Thus, between sensation and memory psychophysics can find only a difference of degree, the former being the source of strong psychic states, the latter, as time goes by, increasingly weaker ones. Matters are different for Bergson who, as we have seen, places sensation in the ambiguous position between a reality that operates according to strict causal laws, and what he calls in his first work the "fundamental self," [21] comprised of memory, that is capable of introducing indeterminacy into this reality. While the "elementary vibrations" of the actual world represent the *real content* of sensation, in memory, in the *moi fondamental,* we find its *virtual ground.*[22] Thus, sensation does not simply *register* pure presence for the organism; rather, together with perception, it continually receives into itself the past while at once suggesting what may come in the future.

If sensation were not situated in this ambiguous position, if it were regarded to be a function of a totally extended being rather than that extremity of psychic life which actualizes itself in relation to material reality, we would have no problem reverting to the psychophysical understanding of the increase and diminution of pain in terms of container and contained such as that which is repudiated in *Time and Free Will*, since

[20] *Matter and Memory*, p. 152/181
[21] Bergson's first articulation of this idea of the "fundamental self" can be found in *Time and Free Will*, p. 129/96.
[22] *Matter and Memory*, p. 138/153

we would find in sensation nothing that would complicate a relationship of pure extensities. The greater pain would contain the smaller pain, the greater pleasure the smaller one, and so on, each being registers of forces that move in material reality. Furthermore, we could revert to an understanding of memory as mere impoverished presence, and forgetting could be understood as the expression of a diminishment of the force that characterizes the present moment. According to this theory, if there is a schism that opens up between the present and the past, this is not because, as Bergson asserts, the present is the site of lived experience which *requires* forgetting with regard to those memories that are not useful for it, but only because the force of the living present diminishes as it recedes into the past. To this theory of memory and sensation the Bergson of *Matter and Memory* concedes that it is truly the real movement of elementary vibrations that characterizes the sensation of the present. But however much these movements may play a role in affection, he holds that they play no such role in memory as such. For him, the roles are inverted—while material movement provides its source, memory becomes the condition of sensation's sense. As the ground against which sensation finds its sense, memory provides the "vital schema" according to which sensation becomes what it is for the enduring organism).[23] But what happens when these objects appear to us as *threats* to the integrity of the body? As the threatening object approaches, both the tension of memory and that of the nervous system increase. With regard to the nervous system, some motor movement will be necessary; it will be called upon to coordinate a reaction. With regard to memory, the vital *differences* between the present situation and those of the past must be detected. Therefore, consciousness must do one of two things: it must either urgently search for memory images that will assist in answering the question of what sort of movement might prove effective in evading or overpowering the approaching threat, or it must give itself over to the already-formed, habitual motor mechanisms with which similar threats have been thwarted in the past, trusting that these mechanisms will secure the organism against the present threat and carry it forward into the future. But even if it simply places its trust in these ready-made habits to deal with the threat, first it must be assured be that the encounter is not dramatically different from those that it has successfully managed in the past, and so even in this instance, it must turn to memory images. Whatever the case may be, *tension increases*.

[23] Hyppolite, J. "Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson". in L. Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism.* New York: Continuum. p. 117

3. The Tensions of Body and Memory

What precisely is this tension? Are there really two, independent kinds of tension, that of the nervous system and that of memory, as our description might suggest? Or is this a *single* tension that manifests as a kind of contraction of the duration that stretches between them? These questions can be answered by tracing the inverse movement of perception and affection, which corresponds to the closure of the distance between the organism and a dangerous object, such as a lion on the veld. Recall that the distances by which perception marks out its objects are just *intervals* within which the organism might modify its relation to them. As this distance closes between the organism and the threatening object, so also do these intervals within which memory images can insert themselves. But even before the distance closes, the dangerous object already *stands out* from its surroundings within perception. Indeed, what separates it from the surrounding objects is precisely the manner in which it may, under certain circumstances, come to represent a vital threat. In other words, together with the perception of the lion, even when it remains only at a distance that can be seen through binoculars, there already emerges a moderate feeling of *fear,* which explains why this object stands out so distinctly from its others and exerts the enchanting power that it does. However, as long as the beast remains remote, the affective tension remains relatively low, and perception continues along its normal course. But as the distance closes, as we sense this threat moving toward us, stalking us as it does a beast of prey, perception begins to give itself over to affection, and contraction becomes constriction.

In this moment of peril, it is as if all of the activity of thought contracts into one unsettling question: *Am I ready for this?*—a question that reflects the gathering tensions of the impending moment of encounter. Such, it seems, is the nature of *panic*. Panic is the affect before the event of contact. It is the moment when memory and movement begin to collapse confusedly into one another under the constricting tension of the demand to act. Next, as this tension overpowers the demand for action, panic gives over to a feeling of *helplessness* before the total novelty of the present situation; a helplessness that, in having given up on finding the appropriate response, evokes the powerlessness of the past. Really, what the tension of panic indicates is the all-too-rapid closure of the window within which a response to the present threat might be

formulated and, consequently, an increasing inability to coordinate memory images with the demands of the present. Nevertheless, the moment of closure does not necessarily imply the disappearance or total retreat of the profound self into the unconscious. In such a moment, having been so overpowered by the abundance of difference between one's habitual involvements with matter and what unfolds in the event, some may indeed 'blackout' and loose consciousness. Still others will remain vigilantly awake and watchful in spite of their helplessness. In fact, the impending event may bring the profound self to the fore even more. In this case, the profound self of memory stands before the event as before its own fate. Everything that I have been, am or ever will be appears to be at risk. Perhaps this explains the commonness with which those who have had near-death experiences say that, before the moment of impact, their entire life passed before their eyes. In the total helplessness before the event *one has given up on action*, and this resignation to the inevitable enables pure memory to flood into consciousness as water through a ruptured dike.[24]

The affect of panic follows from a confrontation with an impending event that is so abundant with novelty that memory struggles to find a point of purchase. A moment ago, we observed that a *dilution* of qualitative difference evinced in perception is the condition for calculation and control. But this encounter with a strange and dangerous beast is like none before experienced. In it, we find an inversion of the conditions for practical action—precisely the *intensification* of qualitative difference within extension which characterizes affection generally.[25] The presentation of an overabundance of qualitative difference diminishes the possibilities for calculation, and ultimately generates the sense of helplessness. In this encounter, we can sense a triple failure: Firstly, the search for intervals within this experience according to which one might gain some measure of control over it is utterly in vain. The distance appears to be closing

[24] *Matter and Memory, p.* 155/172

[25] "What is an affection?...The more the distance diminishes between these bodies and our own, the more the possible action tends to transform itself into a real action, the call for action becoming more urgent in the measure and proportion that the distance diminishes. And when this distance is nil, that is to say when the body to be perceived is our own body, it is a real and no longer a virtual action that our perception sketches out. Such is, precisely, the nature of pain, an actual effort of the damaged part to set things to rights, an effort that is local, isolated, and thereby condemned to failure, in an organism which can no longer act except as a whole. Pain is therefore in the place where it is felt, as the object is at the place where it is perceived. Between the affection felt and the image perceived there is this difference, that the affection is within our body, the image outside our body. And that is why the surface of our body, the common limit of this and of other bodies, is given to us in the form both of sensations and of an image." *Matter and Memory*, p. 233/262

too quickly for one to search for helpful images, which implies that consciousness' essays into memory on behalf of bodily movement themselves occupy a certain duration. Secondly, even if the distance did not close so quickly, the body itself is ill equipped to deal with the threat, lacking both in the habitual motor-mechanisms and the strength with which to thwart it. And finally, there appears for the superficial self an insuperable *disproportion* between the past and the present which threatens to break the progressive movement into the future—that is, there is nothing within my memory that might come to my aid in such an encounter. The only way in which memory corresponds with the event is that it evokes the pure difference and qualitative multiplicity that characterizes the depths of the profound self. The degree of disproportion between the past and the present is a measure of the *strangeness* of the experience. Everyday experience, far from being marked by this strangeness, rather reveals itself in *familiarity*: "The consciousness of a well-regulated motor accompaniment, of an organized motor reaction, is here the foundation of the sense of familiarity. At the basis of recognition there would thus be a motor order. To recognize a common object is mainly to know how to use it."[26] Or, to put it slightly differently, to recognize a common object is to know how to *manage* or *neutralize* it. But in our example, there is no motor order appropriate to the threat. As it approaches, what was formerly recognized in perception as a lion now transforms into a pure monstrosity, something that is no longer even *recognized* as such.

What we have described here is a moment in which *memory in its totality doubles in confusion over bodily movement*. Each finding the other unready to receive it, bodily movement and memory helplessly pass one other by without merging in synthesis. While the profound self senses that the opening through which it might carry itself forward into the future may be closing once and for all, the superficial self, in sensing the loss of its own past, which has until now remained patiently in wait to come to its aid, is seized with the vertigo of the pure present. This amounts to a rupture in the tension between memory and the body, issuing finally in the very duality of tensions with which we began our discussion. The profound self is given over to *dreaming* in the precise moment in which the body is in so much danger. ("As it happened, my whole life passed before my eyes!") And yet nervous tension has increased to such a degree that there is no possibility for memory to insert itself into the

[26] *Matter and Memory*, p. 93/101

present. The disturbances at the periphery are too extreme, vibrating with such intensity that they have obstructed every point of entry. Because action is now futile, memory crosses the threshold of consciousness, which now hangs over the event like a ghost, at once watching as the bodily condition of its enduring existence undergoes conflagration and confronting everything that it has ever been. Those who have survived traumatic encounters such as the one that we have just described have often remarked that, in the heat of the event, they felt as though they *detached from their own body* and underwent what has been called an 'out-of-body experience.' Can we not explain this by the way that, because of the rupture between them, the profound self, having risen to the level of consciousness, must stand idly by and merely *witness* the movement according to which the superficial self is drawn down into the pure causality and iron logic of the image of matter? As consciousness finds itself instantaneously exiled from the movement of the body, it finds refuge in the unity of memory. In this regard, notwithstanding 'pure perception', which exhibits the pure present only in principle, this sort of bodily movement actually brings us closer to the present than anything else.

We have to wonder whether just such a disproportion as this doesn't provide the basis for a Bergsonian conception of *trauma*. What would be remembered from the traumatic encounter is precisely this radical disproportion between memory and the sensory-motor functions, in which the latter can find nothing in the former that might come to its aid. After such a trauma has been endured, subsequent situations that evoke the memory of this disproportion would issue in the same paralyzing feelings of panic and helplessness that characterized the original event. Such an explanation may provide a new basis for understanding post-traumatic stress disorder.

4. The Ecstatic Doubling of Memory and Body

Whereas the affection of bodily effort and pain are defined by a *real contact* between the organism and object, perception is defined by the distance between organism and object—a distance that really a measure of the interval within which the organism may turn to memory for its answer to the approaching object. Bergson's paradigmatic example of perception, then, is not that of a *disinterested* observation of some inert or harmless object, but rather, a *deeply interested* encounter between the

organism and something that holds threats or promises for it in the immediate future—that is, an object that might issue in affection.

To Bergson's paradigmatic example we can oppose that of physics, which takes an apparently disinterested observation of some harmless object or relations between objects to exemplify the true perceptual relation between organism and object, and it is this disinterestedness that will provide the basis of scientific objectivity. Once again, the specter of homogenous space can be divined beneath this disinterested perception of the object, spreading itself out in every direction as the absolute setting within which impersonal forces meet one another. But as soon as the distance between the object and the organism is understood as an interval for choosing ones response, it straightaway looses the aspect of an absolute that is devoid of subjective quality. 'Space' becomes rather *a site of vital encounter*, imbued with all of the fearful or hopeful possibilities that such an encounter might hold for the organism.

On this basis, we can assert that perception actually aims at preventing the confused collapse of material movement and memory which issues in the 'impurity' of affection. Concrete perception is also marked by an alloy of bodily sensation and memory image. Nevertheless, the free coordination and alignment of bodily disposition with memory images in response to the call to action from the extended world amounts to a *success* on behalf of perception. But, once again, such a free response requires time within which the memory image can be coordinated with bodily movement in the perception. Moreover, there must be something within memory that can come to its aid. And finally, the body must already possess motor-mechanisms that might be capable of thwarting the threat. It is doubtless true that, as Bergson says, "there is no perception which is not prolonged into movement."[27] But in this ecstatic doubling of memory over the body such as that of the traumatic encounter, we find an example precisely of a *failure* of perception, which is now prolonged into a movement that has been alienated instantaneously from the vital schema that memory provides. This sensation of movement is one in which memory can offer no assistance. Insofar as the possibility of assistance from memory represents the condition of freedom, such a sensation can only be said to indicate a moment in which this freedom instantaneously breaks down—that is, *a moment in which the body is captured by necessity*. Here, it must entirely follow in the direction of nature and endure the

[27] *Matter and Memory*, p. 94/101

impact. The body, this "pointed end" that is the "ever advancing boundary between the future and the past," is for an instant held fast by the present. As such, it no longer functions as a *conductor* "interposed between the objects which influence it and those on which it acts," but rather only helplessly receives into itself the influence of the hostile object.[28]

These considerations raise the question of the unique status of the present in Bergson's philosophy. What have we just described if not a movement within the present that has remained indifferent to the synthesizing activity of consciousness? And how can we square this with what Bergson has told us about durational consciousness—namely, that it can only but *pass through the present as a moment of transition*, without ever engaging with the present qua itself except in relation to a past of which it is a contraction or a future of which it is an anticipation. Unless the present exhibits this easy-flowing transitional character intermediate between the past and the future such as that which is exhibited in normal sensation, the primary condition of freedom remains unfulfilled. But must we conclude from this that the present does not exist? Deleuze appears to think as much, claiming that "the present is *not*...The past, on the other hand,...has not ceased to be...it IS, in the full sense of the word: it is identical with being in itself."[29] But does not a moment of radical necessity such as the one that we have attempted to describe provide us with a glimpse of the present as such? Is this not a moment of an intransigent present that instantaneously sticks out like a thorn in the side of duration?

Rudolf Bernet appears to strike the right balance when, against this claim of Deleuze that the present possesses no existence, he suggests that, even if this present is never registered except as transition between past and future for intensional consciousness, there is indeed a present for corporeal perception. The extremity of organic life that perceives the vibratory movements of the material world—namely, the "central telephonic exchange" that is the brain—must itself be situated on the plane of matter and, as such, it must exist as a moment of the image of material presence.[30] "If a pure present does not exist for consciousness and yet exists nonetheless, this can only be for the perceiving body, or more precisely, for the brain that receives and transmits a present excitation. The conclusion to be drawn is that, in Bergson, there is only a

[28] *Matter and Memory*, p. 78/82
[29] Deleuze, 1991, *Bergsonism*, p. 55
[30] *Matter and Memory*, p. 30/34

present for corporeal perception and that, moreover, such a 'pure' material perception has nothing in common with intensional consciousness."[31] Bernet is no doubt correct in opposing Deleuze on this point. The latter's claim that "the present is not" neglects the critical shift that Bergson made between *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, in which matter is accorded a genuine existence of its own. In *Bergsonism*, though it would appear to concern itself chiefly with *Matter and Memory*, the 'fundamental self' of the earlier work seems to reappear under the rubric of the pure past as the only thing that genuinely exists. In this way, Deleuze has reintroduced the reductionary monism of Bergson's early work whereby matter and the present possess no ontological status of their own, each being reduced to a pure past which progressively unfurls itself toward the future, always only passing beyond a material present that merely exists in principle. In Professor Bernet's view, Deleuze has "show[n] all too little interest in the dynamic conjunction, so important for Bergson, between the present and the past...Rather than speaking of the inexistence of the present, it would seem preferable to draw attention to the fact that, for Bergson, the evanescence of the present is ballasted by the weight of the past that not only saves the present from foundering in nothingness but that also gives it a dimension of depth."[32]

With our example, we have stumbled upon an instance in which this dynamic conjunction is disturbed. But even if this is so, we can see that it only provides an example of an instantaneous disjunction between the past and the present. The intensification of affection has momentarily immobilized the influence of the past upon the present, and yet the past remains. The organism that falters in the present looses touch with its own past, which, as we have seen, provides the reserve that it must continually draw upon in order to freely recompose itself in relation to an indefinite future. Using the language of Bernet, what our example reveals is a moment when an instance of the present appears to lose its "ballast" and run amok. Nevertheless, what is revealed is nothing like a hitherto-concealed *originary presence* such as that presupposed by physics, but rather a moment of *disruptive presence* that outstrips the influences of both recollection-memory and its habitual derivatives. If such an encounter revealed the existence of an originary presence, this would threaten to overturn the ontological primacy of memory that is the condition of the subject's free

[31] Bernet, R. (2005). "A Present Folded Back on the Past." *Research in Phenomenology* (35).
[32] Bernet, R., p. 70

response, and deliver us over to a metaphysics of presence which understands memory to be the effect of diluted or weakened presence. Perception, in Bergson's view, is far from a mere transparency of consciousness which grants immediate access to a form of present givenness.[33] If perception concerns itself with the present at all, this is only in the sense that it aims at preventing this present from becoming disruptive, averting those movements within it which might cause consciousness to founder in the present and hinder the smooth-flowing transition from past to future. The *stronger* the affection, the *more* the disruptions which it registers threaten to invert and confuse the vital order between the memory of the past and the present material movement, thus obstructing the free projection of the future and diminishing the subject's sense of meaning. Memory must be allowed to come to the aid of the body, and this means that the latter's movements must be freely selected.

In the moment of helplessness which we have tried to describe, one finds that one's exteriority and interiority loose their vital correlation. The bodily I is instantaneously depersonalized, and yet the "dead weight" of the past continues to lean upon matter, now spreading itself out confusedly over the event itself rather than contracting into coordinated bodily movement.[34] The center of indetermination that is one's embodied point of view dissolves into a swarming of forces, none of which offer to memory a point of purchase. We may ask whether an event such as this represents a culmination of anxiety before death, and whether this isn't just what affection foretells. As we have seen, among the central functions of perception is precisely to *prevent* the confusion and impurity of affection. Is the confusion of affection a herald of death for the organism? May we not say that this effort is at least in some measure motivated by an urgency to prevent the positive movement of conscious life from sinking into nothingness? Does affection really indicate the beginning of a movement by which consciousness is reduced to nothingness—a nothingness which the fatal event threatens to bring about? This is truly a potentially deadly situation. But what would such a death involve?[35]

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[33] Bernet, p. 71

[34] *Matter and Memory*, p. 145/160

[35] In one sense, our example appears to provide yet another example of what Levinas has called in *Existence and Existents* "existence without a world," an existence that is—at least for an instant—extracted from its reference to an inside which provides both the structure and the sense that forms the basis of a world. For Levinas, it is the experience of insomnia that provides us with a glimpse at a moment in which we are confronted with existence in its nakedness. But,

5. Force, Revisited

A moment ago, we examined Bergson's repudiation of the psychophysical concept of impersonal force. We saw that this concept can only be understood by analogy with a *feeling of effort* that has both been denuded of its qualitative character and projected into homogenous space. 'Force,' it was said, is really just the objectivization and substantialization of this feeling of effort. But, we also noted that this involves a fundamental *distortion* of effort whereby it is stripped of its inherent relation to the subject—a subject which is, we must recall, comprised essentially of qualitative differences that stretch from the unextended depths of memory to the pointed end of psychic life, the extended body. The *true* origin of the psychophysical notion of impersonal force is thus radically personal. Moreover, bodily effort, which genuinely exhibits qualitative difference, is abruptly transfigured into a difference of quantity. Force is really movement or effort that has been *alienated* from the vital schemas of memory. In this regard, insofar as sense only arises through the vital schemas of memory and the concept of force is that of something that is supposed to inhere in the real independent of the vital schema that memory provides, 'psychophysical force' appears to be a *senseless concept*.

Certainly, psychophysics has the order of things wrong. We do not see how force can be made into a substance that inheres in nature independent of the subject. Nor must we concede that sensation can only be understood by recourse to the priority of forces, or that sensation somehow magically translates impersonal quantities of force into the qualitative differences experienced by the subject. Bergson's case that memory is the condition upon which sensation finds its sense remains compelling. And, as we have seen, the way that memory comes forward to meet with the movement of the body in the mode of concrete perception, offering to perceptual consciousness those images which most closely fit with the present so that this present can be subtly bent toward a

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unlike our example, in which there is a genuine threat to the organism, the horror of insomnia has nothing to do with any threats that are concealed by the darkness. And this is what makes it possible for Levinas to make the assertion that the horror of insomnia is in no way an anxiety about death: "In horror, a subject is stripped of its subjectivity, of his power to have private existence. The subject is depersonalized. 'Nausea', as a feeling for existence, is not yet a depersonalization; but horror turns the subjectivity of the subject, his particularity qua entity, inside out. It is a participation in the *il y a*, in the *il y a* which returns in the heart of every negation, in the *il y a* that has 'no exits.' It is, if we may say so, the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in annihilation." (Levinas 1987, 56)

future which it does not contain—in these ways memory also represents the condition of freedom. Memory, as Bergson understands it, is thus understood both as the condition of freedom and of sense. From this it follows that the power to give meaning to life goes intimately together with the power to act freely upon matter. Without this capacity for introducing some measure of indeterminacy into the present, man looses his power to determine his own future.

In the light of these observations, it can be seen that "vortices and lines of force are never, to the mind of the physicist, more than convenient figures for illustrating his calculations."[36] Against the backdrop of the demand for action that determines perception, we may begin to realize why these symbols are more expedient than others. Only now, after they have been purified of the radicalizations and distortions according to which they have been transformed into scientific or metaphysical truths, perhaps they may be reintroduced as critical tools.

> Could we, working with [the notions of vortices and lines of force], get back to experience, if the notions to which they correspond did not at least point out the direction in which we may seek for a representation of the real? Now the direction which they indicate is obvious; they show us, pervading concrete extensity, modifications, perturbations, changes of tension or of energy and nothing else.[37]

Between these changes of tension and energy that we encounter in the external world and those that we experience in our own feeling of effort, there is no difference in kind. The tendency to place quantity on one side and quality on the other follows only from a radical inversion of the genuine order of things. That is, we have found in external movement the source of our own movement, and not the other way around. Moreover, we have thrown beneath external movement an indifferent, homogeneous medium. And because we have forgotten that we are responsible for the intellectual act that has been performed in view of transforming what is inherently qualitative into manageable, practicable quantities, we have elevated this medium to the level of a metaphysical truth, and we come to believe we live among the impersonal forces that move there. When viewed with the right eyes, we can see that real movements actually present quality itself—qualities that are "vibrating internally, and beating time for its own existence

[36] *Matter and Memory*, p. 201/226
[37] *Matter and Memory*, p. 201/226

through an often incalculable number of moments."[38] If there is such a thing as *force* in the material world, it is a force that is shot through with quality.

Nevertheless, perhaps there is something of this concept of force that can be salvaged and, with it, the common sense claim that pain is subject to increase and diminution. But what would a Bergsonian concept of force entail? We already saw the way that both physics and psychophysics strip movement of its inherent relation to the subject. We also saw that force, as materialism understands it, is really just *alienated movement*. How do matters change when the essential relation between movement and memory is restored? Affection in its extreme form is marked by the closure of the intervals within which memory can insert itself. It involves a movement that has been alienated instantaneously from the vital schema that memory provides, issuing finally in the ecstatic doubling of memory over the body that we have already examined. Does this not imply that the term 'force' can be applied to affection? *Force, in this rendering of the term, would characterize a movement by which the body is tending to be deprived of its freedom.* An *increase* of force would actually correspond with a *decrease* in the body's power to act as a conductor between the objects which influence it and those on which it acts. It would involve a process by which memory is progressively alienated from the body. And what is this if not, once again, *a form of alienated effort or movement*? Force closes the body off from memory. And because the body's connection with memory is what assures that the past might assist in the effort to shape the future, it measures the movement by which the body is progressively rendered over to the pure present. Therefore, rather than being reduced to the status of a 'senseless concept,' force supplies a concept for the movement by which experience is increasingly dispossessed of its sense by the perturbations and heightened degrees of tension that characterize affection.

[38] *Matter and Memory*, p. 202/227

9

Life and Death in the Philosophy of Henri Bergson

> There is never absolute birth nor complete death, in the strictest sense, consisting in the separation of the soul from the body. What we call births are developments and growths, while what we call deaths are envelopments and diminutions.
>
> —G.W. Leibniz, 1714

> You are dust, and to dust you shall return.
>
> —Genesis, c 800 BC

The notion that there is an undying divine force at the heart of existence is one that resonates deeply within Bergsonian philosophy. Indeed, this notion is perhaps Bergson's most basic intuition. It provides the basis for his rejection of mechanistic physics in *Matter and Memory*. In *Creative Evolution*, it supplies the basic insight into the evolutionary movement of biological life, and so it also provides the basis for his rejection of the mechanistic theories of the neo-Darwinians. The very creative drive that can be discovered within ourselves can also be seen to operate more generally within nature as an *élan vital*. Whereas these works are merely applications and revisions of this basic insight regarding the undying creative force at the heart of existence in the domains of physics and biology, *Time and Free Will* is the work in which this intuition finds its first articulation.

Late in life, Bergson would avow his affinity for Catholicism, refusing to convert only in order to demonstrate his solidarity with the Jews:

> My reflections have led me closer and closer to Catholicism, in which I see the complete fulfillment of Judaism. I would have become a convert, had I not foreseen for years a formidable wave of anti-Semitism about to break upon the world. I wanted to remain among those who tomorrow were to be persecuted. (From the February 8, 1937 entry of Bergson's diary)

Those who wish to find parallels between Bergson's thinking and Christian theology have only turn to his early work, *Time and Free Will*, where he not only accords to the invisible creative movement of duration an ontological priority, but even goes so far as to reduce the extended body almost to the status of an illusion that derives more from a representational order that aims at securing the needs of life than from concrete reality itself. That is to say, even extensity itself in moments assumes the aspect of a mere shadow of the unextended qualitative multiplicity of durational becoming. With the intuition of unextended duration within ourselves we are afforded a kind of immediate access to the creative movement of life. And still more validation for the affinity of Bergsonism with Christian thought can be found in the assertion that the necessity for acting upon the demands of embodied existence are really what obscure the flow of duration, thus inducing us to *fall* into habits and representations that further estrange us from the divine movement of creative becoming. Is the purpose of reflecting on prelapsarian duration not that of the meditation upon this divine creative movement? Is this not a kind of meditation that becomes for the Christian thinker an end in itself and almost a kind of *prayer*?

Time and Free Will could even be understood to offer us a glimpse of the divine creativity at the heart of pain, and the Christian thinker might find new insight into the nature of Christ's Passion. In our experience of intensive sensation, rather than quantitative increases of force Bergson suggests that what we really find is an unfolding of qualitative becoming that corresponds with the creative movement at the core of reality. And if we are inclined to identify the unfamiliar sensations of becoming as painful, it is only because of the way that we have become habituated to certain sensations over others, and have thus lost our feeling for divine creativity. The arc of normal experience over time reflects this tendency for the loss of divine creativity. Unless it is countered by the effort of intuition to *recover* the creative fullness of duration that resides deep in the self, what was originally a richness of qualitative difference will invariably, with age, harden and congeal into differences of mere

quantity. And now, rather than being understood as a host of qualitative differences that *becomes* with the creative unfolding of duration, the body is represented merely as one pre-constituted being among others, each of which presenting a potential threat to the other.

Together with the inurement to habit in sensation there also follows a tightening of the grip of representations upon thought, issuing finally in a mental and physical inflexibility that amounts to the diminishment of our feeling for creativity. Whereas habit and representation (insofar as these representations have lost the dynamism of intuition) mark a tendency for *descent* toward extension, the creative unfolding of qualitative multiplicity that is to be found in the fullness of duration marks a movement of divine *ascent*. Christ's readiness to suffer for man is thus really a sign of His ascent, and it could be said to reveal the deepest intuition of this undying divine creativity. Perhaps it is just this intuition that sets Him apart from his contemporaries who, because of the grip that the prevailing beliefs and cultural habits of the time exerted upon them, found themselves incapable of freeing themselves from the worn-out, decadent order of their age.

However, by categorizing Bergson merely as a 'Christian thinker' we would have not only to neglect important aspects of his account of consciousness, but also the function of the method of intuition with regard to reinitiating man to his forgotten freedom within the world. It is true that consciousness is not totally exhausted by its functional orientation toward the exigencies of embodied life—that it may also "turn toward the useless," go "counter to the natural bent of the intellect," and thereby become aware of the deepest condition of its creativity that is exemplified in durational becoming—but this does not imply that the reflection upon duration is an end in itself.[1] Rather, as Bergson tells us in *Time and Free Will*, the method of intuition aims to restore the original 'dynamic unity' of psychic life that is lost as the representational order becomes ascendant.[2] However much we may be condemned to lose it again when action demands the renewal of a rational calculation that treats differences of quality as differences of quantity, this method momentarily restores dynamism to an organism whose vitality has been weighed down under the accretions of habit and representation. It is *in the wake* of the intuition of the duration at the heart of concrete

[1] *Creative Evolution*, p. 25/29
[2] *Time and Free Will*, p. 239/191

reality, in the movement *back* to our useful, active involvement with the external world that the fullness of freedom and creativity is really in evidence.

Those looking for the consolations of the afterlife in Bergson's philosophy will find themselves wanting. This is a freedom which is never a freedom *from* the challenges of the world such as that which is promised by the Christian afterlife, but a freedom that is always exercised very much *within* the world as a movement of passing through the present on the way toward a future of one's own. This observation will remain important as we turn more fully toward addressing the question of death, which will be the principle aim of this chapter.

And so, with *Matter and Memory,* Bergson considers more deeply what it means to be *within* the world in this way. He seems to realize that reducing extensity to a moment of the durational subject, as he tends to do in *Time and Free Will,* renders it more difficult to explain the very real influence that extended bodies have in determining the organism as a needful being to begin with. The organism is fragile, and it must act in order to secure its survival. In this light, pain is viewed not only in terms of the qualitative multiplicity that is to be found at its core, but it is rightly understood as the sign of a danger to the genuinely embodied organism. It is proof of the real externality of the extended world and to the fact that, at least to some extent, man indeed is exposed to the physical forces that move there—forces which promise destruction for the organism if they are not answered with reactions. How else can we explain the demands of action if not by reference to an extended externality that is just as real as the subject? And so the extended world, rather than being a mere function of its representations, is now held to *stand apart* in some measure from the creative subject, as a real obstacle to its continued survival and creativity.

With this we have arrived at the question that will guide our inquires in this chapter—a question that may be framed along the following lines: Do the threats to the organism that are registered in pain announce the danger of the reduction of the organism to nothingness? Does organic destruction imply the *annihilation* of consciousness? Or does consciousness persist in some way in spite of in spite of dying and thus that Bergson's philosophy is, as Levinas has claimed in *Time and its Other*, a

"philosophy without death?"[3] If so, does this imply that consciousness exists in some way *independent* of the body?

These questions will be examined along two lines within this essay. We will consider the meaning of death from *the standpoint of the subject*, attempting to determine where within experience the specter of death appears, either in witnessing the death of the other or in the experience of a pain that indicates the danger of organic perishing. But even if we detect the specter of death within the experience of pain, it remains to be seen whether it announces the annihilation of consciousness or whether it only concerns the embodied existence of the subject. In order to answer the latter question, it will be necessary to go beyond a consideration of the individual subject and examine the meaning of death from *the evolutionary standpoint*. Whereas *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory* will supply the framework for our examination from the standpoint of the subject, *Creative Evolution* will provide the framework for interpreting the meaning of death from an evolutionary standpoint.

1. A Typology of Dying

In *The Challenge of Bergsonism*, Leonard Lawlor asks the question of whether Bergson's philosophy "measures up...to the standard that Heidegger has set for ontology," in spite of the fact that Heidegger himself has rejected Bergsonism as a mere "reversal" of the Aristotelian conception of time.[4] This standard of course concerns the question of Being, and whether this question has been asked authentically in terms of the interpretation of time, which provides the "possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being."[5] Heidegger undertakes the "destruction" of the tradition of metaphysics, which, in his view, has involved a thoughtless privileging of *presence* of a form of givenness to consciousness and thus forecloses upon approaching the question of Being in terms of time.

Lawlor is right to defend Bergson against the claim. The charge that Bergson merely reverses Aristotelianism suggests a paltry understanding of his philosophy, and

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[3] Levinas, E. (1987). *Time and the Other.* (R. A. Cohen, Trans.) Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press. p. 80

[4] Lawlor, L. (2003). *The Challenge of Bergsonism.* New York: Continuum. p. 28

[5] Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time.* (J. M. Robinson, Trans.) San Francisco: Harper, p. 19

—(1967). *Sein und Zeit.* Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, p. 1

betrays a failure to comprehend what is really unique in his thinking; namely, the concepts of memory and duration. A deeper understanding of these concepts also indicates that in no way can we reduce Bergsonism to the legacy of the metaphysics of presence that Heidegger seeks to destroy. While we do find a description of presence-to-consciousness in Bergson's philosophy, this is only in the mode of concrete perception, which aims at meeting the demands of the external world. However, this is only a specific mode of consciousness, and by no means exhausts its possibilities. Consciousness may also turn back toward the unextended virtual ground of its activity. Whereas in *Time and Free Will* it is the qualitative multiplicity of duration itself that provided the basis for reacting differently, in *Matter and Memory* it is the *memory of the pure past* that opens up virtual differences within the actual world and provides the virtual limit of duration. This memory of the pure past is that of an absolute field of raw qualitative difference which may be selectively divided according to the needs and demands of the embodied organism. Thus, in *Matter and Memory*, it is pure memory that represents the ground of novelty.

To remember pure difference involves the rare and difficult effort of driving consciousness in a direction that is contrary both to habit and the demands of action, resisting these habits and demands long enough to realize that the world might become something other than what it presently is. Thus, the turn to memory involves a "relaxation or perversion of our attention to life."[6] In proportion to the organism's tendency for mistaking itself for its own habitual comportments and representations—that is, for mistaking itself for its own present reflection—this organism will also exhibit resistance to returning to the pure, undifferentiated qualitative multiplicity of pure memory. Also, if it exposed to threats from the external world, it must remain involved with the present in order to defend itself against them, going only as far into the depths of memory as is necessary to find answers to these threats.

The true measure of an organism's vitality is thus its ability to bend consciousness in the direction of the pure past without thereby entirely compromising the organic structures upon which its individual life depends. It must be able to return from its essay into the depths of memory with something useful for action, thus exhibiting a capacity for reordering its actual organizational structures according to virtualities that promise a deeper involvement with life. With the shift in perspective

[6] 1910 Preface to *Matière et mémoire,* p. ii

between *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, duration is now understood as the *tension* between the pure past and the present demands of the genuinely external, extended world. That is, it is understood as a tension between the two positivities that together constitute the ideal limits of consciousness. While it could be said that the perceptual configurations of actual life approach but never entirely reach one limit, remembering approaches and only rarely reaches the other. Becoming thus occurs in function of the shuttling of consciousness between these two limits.

As the extended world makes demands of the organism, consciousness must contract itself into sensory-motor movements and thereby transform itself into present actions within extension that *reflect* those with which it is confronted, both in the sense of mirroring them within itself, and of giving back movements which bear a likeness with those by which it is beset within extension, rather like the Leibnizian monad. But it may also *absorb* some measure of these movements that originate from the external world and hold itself back from immediate reactions long enough to come up with alternatives to its own reflexes. The capacity for the endurance of pain also suggests an ability to hold oneself back from reacting, and in this sense we might say that it is a measure of just how free the individual consciousness is from its material conditions. The religious martyr takes this capacity for enduring pain to its absolute limit—that is to say, he is the one who demonstrates that one can even *die* for one's convictions, absorbing every agony that the world has to give in the name of his vision for the future. The fabric out of which this vision for the future is cut is precisely the pure, unextended qualitative multiplicity of pure memory. Only on this basis does man intuit that life can be other than what it presently is.[7]

However, even in its ordinary practical orientation, concrete perception also involves memory, but it restricts itself only to those more immediately helpful memory images that may come to the aid of everyday action. These are memory images that surround the material objects of vital concern almost in the manner of a halo, as virtual alternatives for action. And so, already within concrete perception, in this halo of virtualities that surround the object, we find an indistinct mist of images that lead us beyond the present. Already there we find a 'line of flight' (*ligne de fuite*) out of the

[7] There is some evidence to suggest that Bergson holds the position that the higher the organism, the more it must be capable of the absorption of external aggression. This opens up the striking comparison with Nietzsche, who argues that the creative master is characterized precisely by his own capacity not only for suffering, but also for returning from this suffering with new orders for life.

present, which, if followed all the way, will lead us beyond the turn of experience toward the pure past. This halo of indetermination appears first of all as a function of the *distances* between the organism and the object of vital concern. This distance in space is really an *interval of duration* within which to imagine virtual actions which might be performed vis-à-vis the object, and provides the occasion for turning toward memory for an answer to the external world's demands. But, as the martyr demonstrates, even in the imminence of contact with the object upon the bodily periphery there remains a reserve of duration within which alternatives may be advanced; namely, that reserve which is opened up by our capacity for absorbing painful encroachments of movement upon the periphery of the body. Of course, the painful interval is limited by the durability of the organism, since extreme aggressions from the external world will punch through the periphery and result in the destruction of what Bergson calls the "central telephonic exchange" that is the nervous system, and thus in death.[8]

Whether these comments will suffice to absolve Bergson of the charge that his philosophy is another iteration of the metaphysics of presence, we leave this to the Heidegger scholars to decide. Whatever the case may be, these discussions have served to bring us closer to our own question of whether Bergson's thought is, as Levinas has put it, a "philosophy without death." On this account Leonard Lawlor is of a decidedly different opinion than Levinas, claiming rather that "the experience of pure memory must be an experience of death."[9] In his view, because the turn toward memory is a turn away from the demands of the present—a turn that always involves turning away from actual life—this must also mean that opening oneself up to memory amounts to opening oneself up to death. In his essay, "A Present Folded Back on the Past," Rudolf Bernet rejects this interpretation, siding instead with Levinas. According to Bernet, Lawlor's interpretation of Bergson has introduced something akin to the Freudian hypothesis of a death drive into every living organism—a move that is, in his view, entirely alien to Bergsonian thought.[10]

In the remainder of this work, we will seek something of a *rapprochement* between these two apparently contradictory positions, following our own path to understanding them. While we certainly do not wish to make Bergson into a kind of

[8] *Matter and Memory*, p. 30/34
[9] Lawlor, 2003, p. 59
[10] Bernet, 2005, p. 75

proto-Heideggerian thinker, there may be something within Heidegger's thought to may help us in our effort to frame our discussion. Indeed, this effort to understand death will necessitate the undertaking of what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* a "typology of dying...[which is] a characterization of the conditions under which a demise is 'Experienced' and the ways in which it is 'Experienced'."[11] Moreover, we may find some orientation in Heidegger's question of whether "the expression 'death' [has merely] a biological signification or one that is existential-ontological," and availing ourselves of the Heideggerian distinction between *perishing,* which always only concerns the *destruction* of the embodied organism, and *dying*, which concerns the collapse of consciousness into nothingness, or its *annihilation*. In view of parsing out this distinction, a deeper examination of the nature of perception is in order.

In the everyday engagements of perception we do find a concern with the effort both to secure the needs of life and to avoid its mortal dangers, and this function of neutralizing threats is as important for the organism as that of knowing how to use the objects with which it is presented. As important as this function is, perception nonetheless exhibits another and perhaps more primary dimension—that is, to care for the conditions of the dynamic conjunction between memory and the present movement, and thus for preserving the organism's ecstatic relation with the present. In this sense, using the language of Heidegger, we might say that perception exhibits both an existentiell (*existenziell*) and an existential (*existenzial*) dimension.[12] The former concerns the ontical durability of the organism, the latter the maintenance of the durational continuity between the past and the future. We might also say that, corresponding to this distinction, perception is characterized at once by its *fear* of dangerous objects and its *anxiety* about maintaining itself for the future.

Thus, in view of bodily durability and the durational continuity of the subject, consciousness must in some sense "hover in anxiety." But what would such an anxiety really disclose? It is obvious that, from a purely ontical standpoint, perception concerns itself with preventing the body from *perishing*. But if it is the case that perception also exhibits this ontological dimension, that it carefully maintains the conditions for the dynamic conjunction between present sensory-motor mechanisms and memory images, may we also assert that perception only concerns itself with the

[11] *Being and Time*, §49
[12] *Sein und Zeit,* 1967, §3

threat of the destruction of the body in view of the more profound threat of the reduction of consciousness to nothingness? And if perception aims at preventing the confused disjunction between movement and memory that manifests as *affection*, it would seem that consciousness must have already "caught sight" of this disjunction, much like the nothing in Heidegger's thought.[13] That is to say, the perceptual function would in some way be motivated by the organism's anxiety about this disjunction, a disjunction that must have already exposed itself to consciousness in the form of affection.

We do not wish to make too much of this comparison between the specific concepts of Heidegger and Bergson, but it nevertheless provides us with the opportunity to raise the question of whether Bergsonian perception conceals a hidden negativity at its core or is oriented in some way toward preventing the organism from falling fully under its sway. We will see that an understanding of Bergson's concept of *affection* will provide one of the keys to answering this question of whether consciousness is threatened with nothingness.

2. The Death of the Other

Among the ways in which we might have an experience with death is that of encountering the death of the other. The sight of the other's dead body often stirs in us an upheaval of feelings that have been put to rest in normal perception. What explains the fascination and horror of the sight of a mammal's decomposing, worm-eaten body exerts upon us if not the way that it presents itself as an inevitability for us? What was once a source of the warmth of life and a site of agile, harmonized movement is now reduced to this lifeless thing that shamefully lies in the dirt. Where before this body was a *unified center* of coordinated effort and vitality, it is now undergoing decomposition and succumbing to the indifference of matter.

This decompositional movement is always also *a process of decentralization*. The only life that remains here is that of the frenzied multitude of the maggots' movements—a swarming, mindless multiplicity that feeds greedily at the core of what before was a graceful, moving unity. However, it is not merely the appearance of

[13] "Wie soll aber ein Verneinbares und Zu-verneinendes als ein Nichhaftes erblickt werden können, es sei denn so, daß alles Denken als soches auf das Nicht schon vorblickt?" (Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* 1931, 21)

spatial decentralization that explains our morbid fascination, but the way in which the body of this once spontaneous, vibrant animal no longer maintains itself in tension with its environment. The higher the animal, the more it must have preserved this tension within itself and stood out as irreducible to its surroundings, as a center of spontaneity and a source of tension not only for itself but for those other higher organisms with which it shared its environment. This dimension of our fascination does not pertain to anything essentially spatial, but more deeply to the loss of the duration that was specific to this organism. Together, the process of decentralization and the loss of durational tension represent the irreversible loss of this individual instance of organic order into the oblivion of materiality.

While we feel a kind of sympathy with the living animal, we feel no such sympathy with the decomposing body. Rather, if we feel any sympathy at all, it is with what this animal formerly was. There is a sense that something has been lost. We feel elegiac, mournful about this loss, and perhaps repelled by what has been left behind. Where before there was the undeniable presence, now there seems only to be an absence. Of course this absence is not at the level of materiality, but at that of life. Indeed, the decomposing body is abundant in materiality—perhaps even too abundant. What it really lacks is a living order. Even if the body is that of an animal that died peacefully only a moment ago, still the unity of its body is a shadow of its former unity. Here, the essence of this unity that is the living organism really makes itself felt in its absence. More than the sum of its parts, the living body cannot be reduced to the merely material unity of the corporeal body. The unity of the living body is rather *a unity of action and effort*. In this regard, whereas the dead body is merely an object, the living organism is as much an *act* as it is a *thing*, which is why Bergson can say in Creative Evolution that, "we are, to a certain extent, what we do."[14] This is why the organism exhibits itself as an indivisible movement of life rather than a mere composite of mechanical parts.

Where once there was order now there is disorder. And where before we found a kind of life with which we could sympathize, now we find only an absence and a lack. But where, between this transition from living organic unity to decomposing body, may we find nothingness? This body has not slipped out of being, but has merely changed forms; apparently passing from a state of order to one of disorder.

[14] *Creative Evolution*, 2005, p. 6/7

This disorder is not nothing. Indeed, it is not even 'disorder' except in the light of the expectations of the subject. That is, though the body of the decomposing animal exhibits no living order with which we can sympathize, this does not imply that it is entirely devoid of order, let alone living order. In fact, this body is actually teeming with life—only it is a form of life that feeds on decay. Thus, if we carefully examine the matter at hand, we find that one reality has merely been *substituted* for another. It is for this reason that Bergson makes the claim in *Creative Evolution* that "annihilation signifies before anything else substitution."[15] "We are immersed" says Bergson, "in realities and cannot pass out of them; only, if the present reality is not the one we are seeking, we speak of the absence of the sought-for reality wherever we find the presence of another."[16]

What is absent or 'negated' in my perception, having been filtered out in accordance with my interests, is preserved in memory as the forgotten remainder of the selections of perception. However, in its most immediate activity even concrete perception does not itself involve an operation of negation so much one of marking out the present from the differences of pure memory. It creates the present by means of a "contraction" of the past, which in its purity, is pure difference. Nevertheless, concrete perception has a tendency to further solidify into habits and representations. More precisely, as we become habituated to the limitations which perception imposes upon memory in view of action, these limitations further congeal into representations that are now mistaken for the real. And now, because concrete perception has largely given over to a representational order, these differences reassert themselves in experience and take the aspect of negativities.

Detaching ourselves from the bias of experience toward action, we can see that the 'lack' or 'negativity' that we have encountered in the dead body of the other is only relative to our interests (or, more precisely, to a sympathy that is based upon a shared interest in life). When viewed in the correct light, a 'negativity' such as this is actually an evocation of the *positive differences* of pure memory, however much these differences have retreated from a consciousness that looks exclusively to action. The immense *difference* between what I have become accustomed to when I have seen animal life (the lively flow of movement and vitality) and what I now find (the body

[15] *Creative Evolution*, p. 233/283
[16] *Creative Evolution*, p. 225/273

reduced to an inert mass) throws me back upon the hidden past which one can only find within the depths of myself; namely, the pure past of qualitative multiplicity out of which not only my life, but the life of the other, has been carved.

This experience of the death of the other reveals one of the central concerns of perception; namely, the prevention of the annihilation of my own body. But, again, we must be careful about our terms. Here, what concerns us is not so much *annihilation,* but *destruction* of the body understood the site of a specific organic compositional order that supplies the location for the coordination of movement and memory. According to Bergson's view in *Matter and Memory*, just as memory preserves itself irrespective of whether it remains virtual or is actualized, the image of extended matter endures irrespective of whether it is organized into living organic centers or remains unorganized as inert materiality. Thus, what is under threat is not the image of matter as a whole or even the particular materiality upon which organic life has organized itself, but the specific manner according to which this organism has marked itself out as an organizational center within nature. The organism is the site of the inscription of memory upon matter, where memory has transfigured itself into an aggregate of habitual sensory-motor mechanisms according to which it can maintain itself as a center. Death, in this sense, only implies the leveling out of the organizational center, and is comparable to Heidegger's notion of 'perishing,' which is really more of a purely biological concept than an existential-ontological one. This is the erasure of the *actualized memory inscriptions*, the inscriptions of memory upon matter. Thus, perishing marks the retreat of memory into unactualized virtuality and the return of the organic body to the massivity of matter. It is the instant in which the individual organism has not only been totally decentered, but also has been rendered incapable of ever recovering itself as a center again.

To summarize, the encounter with the death of the other amounts to witnessing the decentralization of what was formerly a center of organic life and movement. But more than this, in the death of an other organism we find the loss of its capacity to maintain itself in tension with its environment. This is nothing more than the loss of the duration that is specific to this being. Now there is little that separates dead organism from what was formerly its environment. No longer can it adjust itself to external demands by means of sensory-motor movement. Not only has it lost its habits, it has also seems to have lost whatever future was secured through the deployment of

these habits. Nevertheless, the materiality of the organism remains, but it has merely changed forms. Organized materiality has now given over to disorganized materiality. But again, this materiality appears as 'disorganized' only by reference to the expectations of the witness. If this witness finds nothing here with which we can sympathize, this is not necessarily because it has lost duration altogether, but because this duration is too remote from our own. That is, the duration of the dead organism has fallen back into what from our standpoint characterizes the duration of materiality, which forms a kind of backdrop against which the duration that is specific to higher life sets itself apart. If there remains some measure of spontaneity here, it is infinitesimal and eludes our senses entirely.

3. My Own Death

Now that we have examined the experience of the death of the other, let us now turn to the possibility of the experience of death within oneself, which Lawlor identifies with that of pure memory. The key to understanding his claim rests with the nature of affection, which Bergson identifies as a "specialized perception" in *Matter and Memory*.[17] Defining affection in this way implies that if we are to arrive at a deeper understanding of affection we must first understand perception. Our course to arriving at this understanding will involve an examination the developmental process according to which perception elaborates itself from infancy to maturity. This will yield insight not only with regard to how memory and movement are coordinated, but also how the organism first marks itself out as a center within space. Furthermore, it will help us to understand that, while perception involves the *dynamic conjunction* of movement and memory, affection amounts to the *confused disjunction* between them in which potentially threatening movements within matter which are entirely unfamiliar and for which the organism has no answer evokes the profound difference of pure memory.[18] We will see that the development of perception is motivated to some degree by an experience of this disjunction of affection which announces the threat of impending destruction for the organism—the very same in which Lawlor discovers the specter of death.

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[17] *Matter and Memory*, p. 57/58

[18] See p. 190 – 192 of Chapter 8 for more on this.

Together with learning how to use the objects of perception, the child also learns how to avoid its threats. Some measure of his understanding with regard to how to manage and avoid threats can be attributed to the role that the parents have played in informing the child through language, but it is likely that an even larger measure derives from immediate experience. For example, it is often not enough to merely explain to the child that touching the burner on the stove will result in injury. These terms have yet to obtain a vital reference for the child—that is, the child must have some memory of 'hurting yourself' in order to understand that these words refer to something that is to be avoided, an encounter which will inevitably come to be represented as a *negative experience*. Indeed, such a negative experience is probably responsible for underscoring the original division of the child's own body from those of others, thus reinforcing the sense that the periphery of the body represents a kind of limit between himself and the external world. Furthermore, it may be that these experiences serve to center the body within extension.

The body of the infant is no less a part of the image of matter than the adult's, but the former must learn to distinguish his own body from those of his surroundings—a process which is intimately related to the progressive development of motor functions. Each of these developments would also appear to correspond with the initial projection of the homogenous medium of space and the child's awareness that he is present as a center within it. While we do not wish to go so far as to posit a causal relation, it is clear that there is at least a strong correlation between the overwhelming multiplicity and heterogeneity of childhood experience, the development of perception and, finally, the projection of homogenous space as the abstract locale within which representations inhere.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson asserts that that the projection of space probably represents a kind of "reaction against heterogeneity." What is the character of this heterogeneity? In this work, this reaction is thought to occur against "the very ground of experience," here understood in terms of the unextended qualitative multiplicity of pure duration.[19] In other words, the representations of quantitative difference and of the homogenous medium of space not only provides a framework within which action becomes possible; it also delivers the organism from the overwhelming heterogeneity of pure duration. However, while it may be true that the

[19] *Time and Free Will*, p. 97/72

act by which space is projected beneath what originally exhibits itself as heterogeneous does represent a kind of reactivity, is this reactivity really aroused by the heterogeneity of pure duration as Bergson suggests in *Time and Free Will*? Isn't it more likely that this original reactive moment unfolds vis-à-vis the heterogeneity of affection, which is, as he asserts in *Matter and Memory*, an impure confusion of unextended memory and genuinely extended movement?

With *Matter and Memory,* Bergson declares that the body is genuinely situated upon the plane of matter, and this claim would seem to provide us with the resources for a deeper explanation of the reaction. With this work, Bergson establishes that concrete perception enables the organism to more or less freely overlay memory images with sensory-motor functions, thus directing the organism toward a future that is entirely its own. By contrast, the confusion and "impurity" of affection prevents the organism from acting freely.[20] Likewise, the projection of the homogenous medium of space further provides a useful schema that makes it possible to avoid the confused collapse of memory and matter that issues in affection. Now we can understand the source of the reactivity—which was conceived in *Time and Free Will* as a purely unextended heterogeneity of pure duration—in terms of the confused impurity of alienated bodily movement and the whirlwind of impotent memory images that characterizes affection.

It is true that concrete perception, like affection, also exhibits an alloy of memory and movement and that it is also, in the strictest sense, 'impure.' But perception is separated from affection by the way that, whereas perception involves a *harmonization* of the tension of memory with that of the sensory-motor functions, in affection the tension of the body tends to outpace that of memory, creating some measure of *dissonance* between them. The reaction against heterogeneity, in this case, would first of all represent a reaction against just this dissonant impurity. In childhood affection, consciousness has already caught sight of what threatens its sense of freedom and meaning. This original glimpse of the helplessness of affection drives consciousness to seek after the freedom that issues from the harmony of concrete perception.

For the infant child, in the time before he has constructed motor mechanisms or learned to coordinate memory images with them so that they may be improved in

[20] *Matter and Memory*, p. 58/59

view of action, the world hangs too close. There is almost no form of sensation that is not also potential source of agitation. The smallest disturbance or change of environment can drive the child into hysterics. Whereas most animals come out of the womb already equipped with some ready-made (instinctual) motor capacities, the human infant has no such inborn motor facilities. This period is characterized by *helplessness* if for no other reason that that the child has no recourse to his affects other than those provided by his parents. This means that, whereas the animal, by virtue of his inborn capacities for coordinated movement, arrives on the scene already as a center, the infant child must rely upon his parents to treat his body as a center. The process of transforming the body into a center corresponds with that of building up motor mechanisms on the bodily field of immediacy that is originally a host of affective difference. Thus, the perceptual order is really just the product of past efforts to build up an aggregate of sensory-motor mechanisms within the body that reflexively maintain it as a center, both by securing necessities and fending off threats.

The task of the perceptual function is first of all one of separating out the elements of movement and memory, and then with maintaining this separation except in moments when they are brought together selectively in the subject's own way to create a present in accordance with its freedom. Together with the transformation of his own body into a center, as the child develops a facility for habitual sensory-motor movement and for overlaying memory images with these movements, so also does his capacity for managing the affects progress. And finally, there also emerges a corresponding capacity for representation, in which the child takes his own body as a central point that is surrounded by space on all sides that is populated with beings. With this achievement, the child, who was formerly little more than a mere animal, is now capable not only of the coordination of movement and memory in concrete perception, but also of further diminishing his affects by escaping into representation. Now he has crossed the threshold into the cultural world of man.

If the child's development continues along a normal course, presumably this will culminate in a well-balanced perceptual function that features a fitness between his memories of the past and present movement, which will assure that he of a capable of a vigorous, healthy life. In the following long passage, Bergson has this to say about such a life:

> It is from the present that the appeal to which memory responds comes, and it is from the sensory-motor elements of present action that a

> memory borrows the warmth which gives it life. Is it not by the constancy of this agreement, by the precision with which these two complementary memories insert themselves each into the other, that we recognize a 'well-balanced' mind, that is to say, in fact, a man nicely adapted to life? The characteristic of the man of action is the promptitude with which he summons to the help of a given situation all the memories which have reference to it...To live only in the present, to respond to a stimulus by the immediate reaction which prolongs it, is the mark of the lower animals: the man who proceeds in this way is a man of impulse. But he who lives in the past for the mere pleasure of living there, and in whom recollections emerge into the light of consciousness without any advantage for the present situation, is hardly better fitted for action: here we have no man of impulse, but a dreamer. Between these two extremes lives the happy disposition of a memory docile enough to follow with precision all the outlines of the present situation, but energetic enough to resist all other appeal. Good sense, or practical sense, is probably nothing but this.[21]

The man who is nicely adapted to life strikes a balance between his (self-)involvement with the past and his immersion in the present. He does not forsake the present in favor of idle reveries or allow himself to be captivated by his memories. And he acts according to the demands of the present without abandoning himself entirely to it. These are the characteristics of a man who is nicely adapted to life.

However, if this man had not had the good fortune of having a manageable life, if he had been visited by frequent menaces in his childhood and had lived a life that only promised more of the same, perhaps he would have compensated himself in his moments of repose by giving himself over to dreaming—a tendency which would have no doubt further inhibited his efforts to adapt to life or to achieve balance within it. At another level, the presence of such menaces could also swiftly reduce this man to little more than a 'lower animal,' since he would be repeatedly compelled by this menace to merely respond to stimulus with immediate reactions. In any case, he would find himself caught in a kind of downward spiral. Seized in one moment by the urge to dream, in the next, as the menace reasserts itself, he would be subject to powerful affections. As each tendency bolsters the other, this life would soon lose its center of gravity and spin off into madness or despair.

With regard to our ill-fated man, if his life is 'diminished,' it would seem that this is less in the sense that it is haunted by nothingness than that it is wanting for the balance that characterizes the healthy, well-adjusted life; a balance that is secured in

[21] *Matter and Memory*, p. 153/170

normal perception. And if this life is 'too much,' it would seem that this only pertains to the frequency with which this man is given to disturbing affects. In other words, it is because he is subject to too much impurity and confusion in perception (the very same that characterizes childhood) that he feels that life itself has become too much. It is as if the external world has become too present, looms too near, and barely leaves him with the space (interval) within which to adjust himself to its ever-renewed, all-too-pressing demands.

Let us summarize our conclusions so far. Our discussions appear to have brought us closer to an answer to the question of whether affection announces the threat of nothingness to the organism. If it were the case that perception aims at preventing the confused collapse of memory and movement *and this collapse also threatens consciousness with its annihilation*, then indeed we would be justified in asserting that perception involves a reaction against nothingness. But if perception seeks to inhibit this collapse and yet it does *not* also imply the annihilation of consciousness, then perception would involve no such reaction against the threat of annihilation, and the reactive tendencies of perception would have to be explained in a different way. It should be clear from our discussion that *Matter and Memory* locates durational consciousness always somewhere between the positivities of extended movement and memory. While an excessive preoccupation of consciousness with either the representations of the present or with memories of the past may amount to a diminishment of vitality, this does not imply death in the sense of a passing of consciousness over to nothingness.

Nevertheless, powerful affections do have implications for the life of the individual organism, which is to say, they probably announce the threat of death in the sense of *organic perishing*. Extreme affections involve a confused impurity of movement and memory, and correspond with the flooding of consciousness with the multiplicity of pure memory in a kind of return of the developed organism to the primordial helpless of the infant child. As we have seen, this primordial helplessness of the infant characterizes the moment *before* the development in concrete perception of sensory-motor habits. The development of habits at once provide answers to the movements of the external world and offer themselves as points of purchase for memory images which might serve to improve one's response to these movements. With the presence of an extreme threat, insofar as one is ill equipped to deal with it in

terms of one's motor reactions and thus has no response for it, one is brought before a situation that is unlike anything that concrete perception has hitherto been confronted with in adult life. Because it differs so radically from one's normal experience, it evokes the profound difference that characterizes pure memory, and thus inundates consciousness with differential multiplicity with the force of a flood, thus rendering it incapable of finding its grip. This testifies to the fact that this experience of pure memory indeed does herald the death of the organism.

Thus, Lawlor is in a sense correct in his claim that the experience of memory is the experience of death. At the level of its materiality, the living organism is nothing more than an accumulation of the contractions of duration that are sensory-motor mechanisms, and it maintains itself is a center of action by means of these mechanisms. Insofar as these mechanisms are not equal to the task of thwarting the threat, the latter raises the possibility that the organism will be decentered, reduced to inert materiality, and thus lose the durational tension with its environment that has been won by the organism's former efforts. However, this amounts only to the destruction of the body understood the site of a specific organic compositional order and the erasure of the actualized memory inscriptions of the nervous system that together with pure memory ensure that the individual organism will have a future that is irreducible to its past. When Bergson says, in "The Soul and the Body," that because memory survives the destruction of parts of the brain, it is probable that the soul survives for a time after the destruction of the body,[22] all he means is that, by virtue of the way that pure memory remains in some way oriented toward actualization, it continues for a moment to haunt those centers where it has found purchase in the past in the manner of a "ghost."[23]

4. Death from the Evolutionary Standpoint

Our examinations have revealed that the elaboration of normal perception follows from a reaction against what from the standpoint of the well-balanced, fully developed perceptual function amounts to the confused mingling of the pure positivities of movement and memory. We also saw how affection comes to be identified as a negativity for the organism, and that the emergence of the

[22] Bergson, H. (1920). *Mind-Energy.* (H. W. Carr, Trans.) London: Greenwood Press. p. 65
[23] *Matter and Memory*, p. 145/161

representational order is yet a further articulation of the reactive tendency which issued in the developmental push toward concrete perception.

It is clear that the conditions for the development of concrete perception must already be in place in the infant's immature consciousness. The undeveloped consciousness must already be somehow suspended within the positivities of pure memory and movement. The infant is always already a nascent center of organic movement, endowed by nature with nervous reflexes that cause both its attraction the life-sustaining necessities of food, water and warmth and its aversion to painful stimuli. These reflexive endowments are the last vestiges of instincts that characterize lower animals, and they make it possible for the child to begin to center himself within the plane of extension and eventually to begin to merge memory images with movement, thereby increasing by degrees the range of his freedom. What separates the newborn organism with its undeveloped perceptual capacity from mere matter in movement is that whereas the former possesses an inborn or instinctual capacity for movement, the latter does not and always only changes under the influence of an external force. Nevertheless, the movements of the newborn are apparently not yet freely synthesized with memory, but approximate in many ways a complex machine with an internal principle of durability and survival. Certainly, if organic life never surpassed this primitive, merely reflexive relationship with its environment then the mechanistic psychophysical account would remain somewhat more compelling. Consciousness could more easily be understood as an epiphenomenon of mechanical forces acting within and upon the body, and freedom could be brushed aside as merely illusory.

If the newborn is already a nascent center and is endowed with these internally motivated mechanisms then, like the sensory-motor coordination that characterizes mature perception, these inborn mechanisms must themselves be the product of a movement of genesis. Of course, the individual organism cannot have been responsible for building up these mechanisms—they arrive on the scene *ready-made* as vestiges of instinctual endowments within the structure or the organism itself which are to be found in lower life forms. How then explain their genesis?

To answer this question we must turn to evolutionary biology. Darwin argues that their origin corresponds with the accumulation of useful mutations over time. These mutations determine the fitness of the organism to its environment, and whether the organism which possesses them will be able to survive long enough to propagate.

Whereas organisms which have undergone harmful mutations perish quickly and are eliminated as candidates for reproduction, those which have undergone beneficial mutations vis-à-vis their environment live longer and outnumber their inferiors. Mutation also supplies the basis for the development of novel reflexive or instinctive mechanisms which, together with the development of stronger, faster or more durable corporeal structures, provides an explanation of the inborn, instinctual capacities for movement which can be found in the young organism.

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson repudiates this view of evolution. While he does not go so far as finalism in the elimination of all accidental variation in the development of life, he also does not accept the neo-Darwinian account of development that asserts that highly-evolved organisms are the result of nothing more than a proliferation of mutually complimentary accidents. Life itself must involve an internal push toward creative development, which he calls the *élan vital*. And in Bergson's view, the evolutionary push that characterizes the *élan vital* does not unfold at the level of the individual organism which, upon developing a new, superior capacity for managing its relations with its environment, then transmits these acquired habits to its offspring, as Lamarck argued. No, the push must be still deeper than even the individual organism. The individual organism is merely the *product* of an evolutionary movement that arcs toward the production of species that are endowed with the means for realizing higher degrees of freedom from material conditions, an arc that culminates in the emergence of the human being.

In Bergson's view, the primary agent of evolutionary development is consciousness. While consciousness in the mode of concrete perception only finds its conditions in the organic body, consciousness-as-such must be understood as the origin of the organic structures that are to be found there. The individual consciousness then uses these organic structures that have been created by consciousness-as-such in view of its own purposes. This is to say that consciousness is not merely to be found among the particular *effects* of life, but more profoundly provides its universal *cause*. If accidents persist in the expressions of life, this is precisely because of the ever-renewed compromise that consciousness must make with material reality. Real occasions for creative activity can be found nowhere but within this extended reality, and this activity always only recruits that which in itself exhibits a tendency for inertia into a movement that follows in some measure the rhythm of life.

In this regard, the broad movement of organic evolution parallels the development of the individual human life from its birth to its death. Individual development is merely a *redoubling* of this original tendency which is first to be found in evolutionary development more generally. "Organic evolution resembles the evolution of [the individual] consciousness, in which the past presses against the present and causes the upspringing of a new form of consciousness, incommensurable with its antecedents."[24]

We have already seen how this process works for the individual organism in terms of the way that memory finds intervals within the movements of the body within which to insert itself. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson describes how this unfolds in the general evolutionary development of life—a development that will issue finally in the emergence of an individual organism that is capable of a synthesis of concrete perception that provides the conditions for yet a further development of freedom, only now at the individual level. Just as the development of concrete perceptions leaves in its wake deposits of sensory-motor habits which abbreviate what was originally the differential multiplicity of the real, so also does the *élan vital* leave in its wake deposits of its own activity, which are nothing less than the diversity of species that populate the natural world.

Species-life is to the *élan vital* what habit is to concrete perception. Each is the result of a *contraction* of differential multiplicity into a repetition of activity that itself provides the vehicle of transition toward an indeterminate future. Nevertheless, both the *élan-vital* and concrete perception must also find within movement opportunities for introducing indeterminacy and for bending material repetition toward the production of novelty. What can this mean, except that both are specific modes of consciousness? The former mode of consciousness must have already been in place in order for the latter to emerge. Thus, the *élan-vital* establishes the *general* conditions at the level of species-life for the emergence of the *individual* consciousness. Only slowly, over the course of eons, does it build up the organic groundwork upon which the perception of the individual organism will do its work.

The orientation of the lower animal's life is strictly dictated by the intensity of its inherited instinctual dispositions and the inflexible physical endowments that go intimately together with these dispositions. To the extent that the lower animal

[24] *Creative Evolution*, p. 23/27

possesses its own consciousness, this consciousness inhabits the smallest margin between these instinctive dispositions and their respective bodily endowments, both of which remain oriented from birth toward immediate action. From birth until death, animal perception remains inseparably tethered to the rigidly specific functionality of its bodily endowments, effectively rendering any alteration of these functions impossible. Furthermore, instinct provides an insuperable barrier between the individual organism's perceptual consciousness and consciousness as such. It may not transcend its own instinctual disposition and take a recollective view of their origin. It may not decompose these instincts in the way that man may decompose his habit-memories to reveal the differences concealed beneath. And because it is restricted to merely *acting out its instincts* and action always involves a foreclosure of the virtual, neither may it go back toward the virtual ground of this activity in pure memory. This amounts to saying that it may not *sympathize* with the broader movement of life itself, but is rather compelled by nature to remain narrow in its view of things and to sympathize only with the specific occasions for its own instinctive activity within its environment.

Instinct is therefore almost of the order of an *unbreakable habit*—unbreakable precisely because it has been 'hardwired' into the structure of the organism by evolution. If this 'habit' is to be 'broken,' it does not fall to the perceptual consciousness of the individual animal to recover the hidden differences at the heart of a merely habitual composite. It must be done by an effort of the *élan vital* itself at the level of species-life. Even if these 'instinct-habits' admitted of some measure of plasticity, still the lower animal would lack the corporeal endowments for reinventing itself in a radical way. If the insect could be said to possess something like an imagination, certainly its range could never extend so far as to imagine what it might be like to possess human hands.[25] If anything, this imagination is probably restricted to infinitesimal modifications in attitude vis-à-vis those objects of vital concern that are specific to this form of life. This inborn intimacy between the bodily structure and the

[25] Whereas it is difficult to conceive of the insect imagining himself to be a man, it is less difficult to imagine a man becoming an insect. Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, which imagines a transformation in the opposite direction, is really a presentation of the stupefactions of retrogression. It imagines the dreadfulness of a consciousness that has become so narrowly wrapped up in itself that even the spontaneous transformation of its corporeal structures is received more as an *inconvenience* than as a horror. Gregor is more troubled by the fact that he has slept through his alarm than that he has transformed into an insect, revealing the disturbing narrowness of a consciousness that has restricted itself only to the simple demands of work and family life. Kafka, F. (2009). *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories.* (J. Crick, Trans.) Oxford: Oxford World Classics.

structure of the instincts indicates the smallest margin of creative play that is available to the narrow consciousness of lower animals such as insects.

By contrast, higher animals exhibit a greater margin of play. The higher the animal, the higher also is the degree of play between its physical endowments and the instinctual structures of behavior. The degree of tension between instinct and endowment corresponds with its ability to create new means of preserving itself against the threats that await it within its environment—that is, it corresponds precisely to its indeterminacy and its freedom:

> The role of life is to insert some indetermination into matter. Indeterminate, i.e. unforeseeable, are the forms it creates in the course of evolution. More and more indeterminate also, more and more free, is the activity to which these forms serve as vehicle.[26]

What is unique to human life is the way that its organic body always arrives on the scene already abundant with *the promise of the virtual*. This form of life is no longer situated merely among the deposited results of creative consciousness. Now we are confronted with a species that can break down the composites of habit into their constitutive differences and freely engender creativity; not, of course, at the level of evolution, but at the level of the individual life. With this form of life, the promise of the virtual is no longer restricted to the efforts of the *élan-vital*, which undertakes its creative work with imperceptible slowness in the movement of evolution.

Now, as the barriers of instinct fall away, this promise insinuates itself into individual perception, thus creating the opportunity for the individual to manufacture novel technologies to augment what at first blush appears as a poverty of physical endowments. But this apparent physical poverty is really a sign of virtual richness. Where in lesser forms of life there may have been frightful claws with which to level the beast of prey, in man there are hands with which to wield the spear, the hammer, the pen—and a thousand other technologies which may be availed with a view not only to securing the necessities of embodied life, but also of pressing beyond this present embodied life toward an indeterminate future.[27] Now, the margin of creative play extends vastly further than those which were to be found among lesser animals. Whereas the perceptual consciousness of lesser animals ranges only between the ready-made *products* of evolution—namely, the rigidly functional physical endowments on the

[26] Creative Evolution, p. 103/127
[27] *Creative Evolution*, p. 113/140

one side and an instinct for using them on the other—with humans, perceptual consciousness may (in principle) range between the *immanently changeable* habitual sensory-motor movements of the present and a pure memory of the original differential multiplicity out of which these habits have been cut. And not only does this memory touch the fabric out of which one's own individual habits have been cut, *it may, in an act of the deepest sympathy, approach the virtual fabric out of which life itself has been cut.*

By contrast, what we have called 'habit-instincts' present insuperable barriers for the remembrance of this original multiplicity. This is because they are not produced *within* the individual animal but are rather produced *for* it as the results of *transindividual efforts* of the *élan vital*. The process of breaking a habit—a process which is only to be found among the human species—involves passing unobstructed in one's own consciousness back toward this original multiplicity of life. That is, it involves the remembrance of both an original differential field undivided by habit and the successive moments within which the habit has taken hold. Instinct implies a ready-made division of the differential field which, in the animal that is unfettered by instinct, pure memory opens up.

How far into the past does the memory of man extend? Does it begin with embryonic life, or does it extend further than this, into an impersonal, trans-individual past which predates even the emergence of the embryo? If lower animals by nature possess the indelible memory of what we have called 'habit-instincts,' a kind of inherited contraction of memory that has been built up over the course of eons by the *élan vital*, is it not also possible that man might remember the original multiplicity out of which these instincts have been carved? Just as the lower animal 'remembers' instincts that predate its own life, so also might man remember a past that exceeds that of his individual natural life. And would not such a memory provide the condition for sympathizing with the movement of life itself? This must be the deepest, purest of memories of life's first stirrings; a memory of the original moment of pre-individual life in which it found what was the smallest and at the same time the most propitious of intervals within which to carry its promise into the future.

5. Conclusion

Only now do we approach an answer to the question of whether consciousness survives the death of the individual's body. My individual life, together with the freedom and indeterminacy that characterizes this life, is but the result of a conscious push that must have originated with the beginnings of the universe itself. It thus transcends my individuality, which is really just a *moment* in this push toward freedom. If memory haunts materiality from the start, then there is no materiality that is not already in some small measure subject to durational becoming. Inert matter is not dead, but merely marks the extremity of a tendency of life: matter is the most dormant kind of life—it is life waiting for its opportunity to wake up. Organic perishing does not thus imply the death of consciousness as such, but the return of this particular life to dormancy and diminished novelty. The fear of death really follows more from a fear of losing one's individuality and uniqueness of character—always related intimately to my own mode of action and thus to my habits—than it does from a fear of nothingness itself.

With lower animals, this uniqueness is largely limited to the level of the species-life, which has merely inherited a novelty that has been produced by the efforts of the *élan vital*. With human beings, we are confronted with a form of life that is itself capable of the production of uniqueness. It is as if the *élan vital* has succeeded in transferring its power of creativity to one of its products. However, it has not so much transferred its power in ready-made form, but its *memory*. It is really this memory that is the source of the individual organism's power, and to the degree that this memory is not visited by the organism's consciousness, the organism is condemned to mistake itself for its present form and thus to empty repetition. Not being limited by instinctive programming, the human being finds itself capable of consciously remembering the original differential multiplicity out of which life itself has been carved. Whereas the lower animal's consciousness is caught between its instinct-habits and its limited physiological endowments, human consciousness must only put aside the demands of action long enough to reach back toward to this original difference of pure memory—the very same difference upon which the *élan vital* does its work. In putting aside action, the human being may touch the ground of creativity and realize that, in the future, life can and must be other than what it presently is.

At length, we have arrived at the *rapprochement* between the positions of that we Bernet and Lawlor that we sought. While Lawlor is correct in his assertion that the experience of memory is the experience of individual death in the sense of organic perishing, Bernet is likewise correct in claiming with Levinas that Bergson's is a "philosophy without death," if by this he means that a life-force always haunts matter even in its most modest of forms, searching for the smallest of intervals within which to insert differences and thereby introduce some measure of indeterminacy into the universe.

Earlier, in our discussion of infantile consciousness, we veered rather nearly toward the notion that the subject of memory was at one time *present* in the original confused multiplicity of embryonic life. But, with our discussion of the role of memory in evolutionary development, we have arrived at a still deeper source of memory; namely that of the *élan vital*, which guides the creative movement of life from its earliest beginnings. With this, we caught a glimpse of a memory that predates the individual, and provides the virtual reservoir from which life draws its power of creative becoming. And, finally, we have found ourselves once again confronted with the question of whether there is *an original moment of memory*—in this case, in the first moment of life's stirrings within the material universe. What could such an original moment be if not one in which there was *no difference between the present and the past*—i.e. *a pure present*. If we accept the notion that underlying pure memory there must be *a single moment* that provides its original source as a kind of primordial experience of an original multiplicitous present then, however deeply the image of a pure present might be buried under the pure past, we would in the final account find ourselves delivered back over to a metaphysics of presence which Heidegger seeks to destroy. Furthermore, we could scarcely avoid understanding this moment of a pure present as that of a merely material, quantitative multiplicity, and the emergence of life as a mere accident of circumstance. With this, we would be confronted once again with the same problems that *Matter and Memory* sought to overcome; namely, those that follow from privileging quantity over quality, space over time, and the reduction of the life of man to a mere movement of material forces.

No, we must be careful to avoid this surreptitious reintroduction of a metaphysics of presence. *Memory must have haunted matter from the beginning*. And

this also means that the universe is also itself a kind of life, and that there is no instance of matter which is not capable of some small measure of the spontaneity of life.

> [It is] to the totality of the material universe that we ought to compare the living thing...Like the universe as a whole, like each conscious being taken separately, the organism which lives is a thing that endures.[28]

Insofar as the universe *endures*, it too must be kind of life. From its immemorial beginnings, it must have always been haunted by a difference between the past and the present that is the condition for the emergence of an indeterminate future. Without this original difference, there could have been no organic life, which is the product of a creative effort of the *élan vital* that has exploited this differential tension between past and present in order to engender new forms. Moreover, to assert that there was an original moment of pure presence would amount also to avowing that *death predates life,* that life emerges from death, and that the positivity of life emerges from the nothingness of matter—a conclusion which is utterly alien to Bergsonian philosophy. Like every living organism, man is dust, and to dust he is destined to return. Nevertheless, the force of life haunts even the dust.

[28] *Creative Evolution*, p. 13/15

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